



ログ・ホライズン

橙乃
ママれ

eb
enterbrain

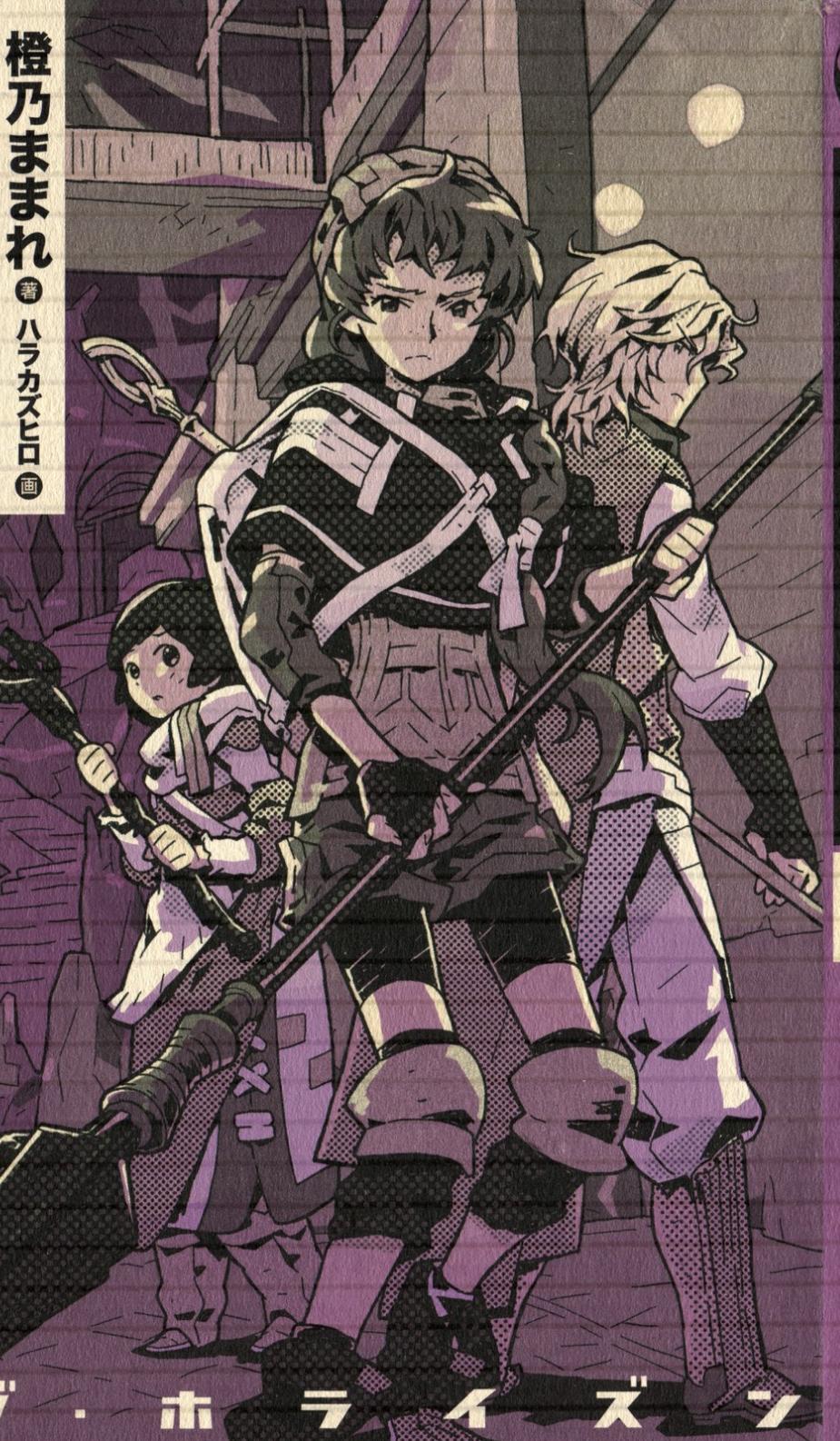
ゲームの終わり

（上）

橙乃ママれ（著）ハラカズヒロ（画）

LOG-HORAI
NOV. 2011

ゲームの終わり（上）



ログ・ホライズン



ログ・ホライズン

橙乃ままれ 著 ハラカズヒロ 監

LOG HORIZON

トウノ
ママレ
ゲームの
終わり
〔上〕

とうの
ままれ

TOUNO
Mamare

eB



ゲ
ー
ム
の
終
わ
り
〔上
〕

ログ・ホ
ラ
イ
ズ
ン
3

eB

ISBN978-4-04-727413-6
C0093 ¥1000E



9784047274136



1920093010009

定価：本体：1,000円 +税

発行：エンターブレイン

LOG HORIZON

Fragrant green winds blow across this land, yet somehow still stand. The imaginary world of Theldoria is home to dragons and giants, monsters and demihumans. With a burden weighing upon your soul, go forth. Only one **Adventurer**! This land spreads out before you like a blank page, make your mark in it!

橙乃ままれ既刊作品

▶まおゆう魔王勇者 1 「この我のものとなれ、勇者よ」「断る!」

▶まおゆう魔王勇者 2 忽那塔(クリルタイ)の陰謀

▶まおゆう魔王勇者 3 聖鏡(せいきん)遠征軍

▶まおゆう魔王勇者 4 この手でできること

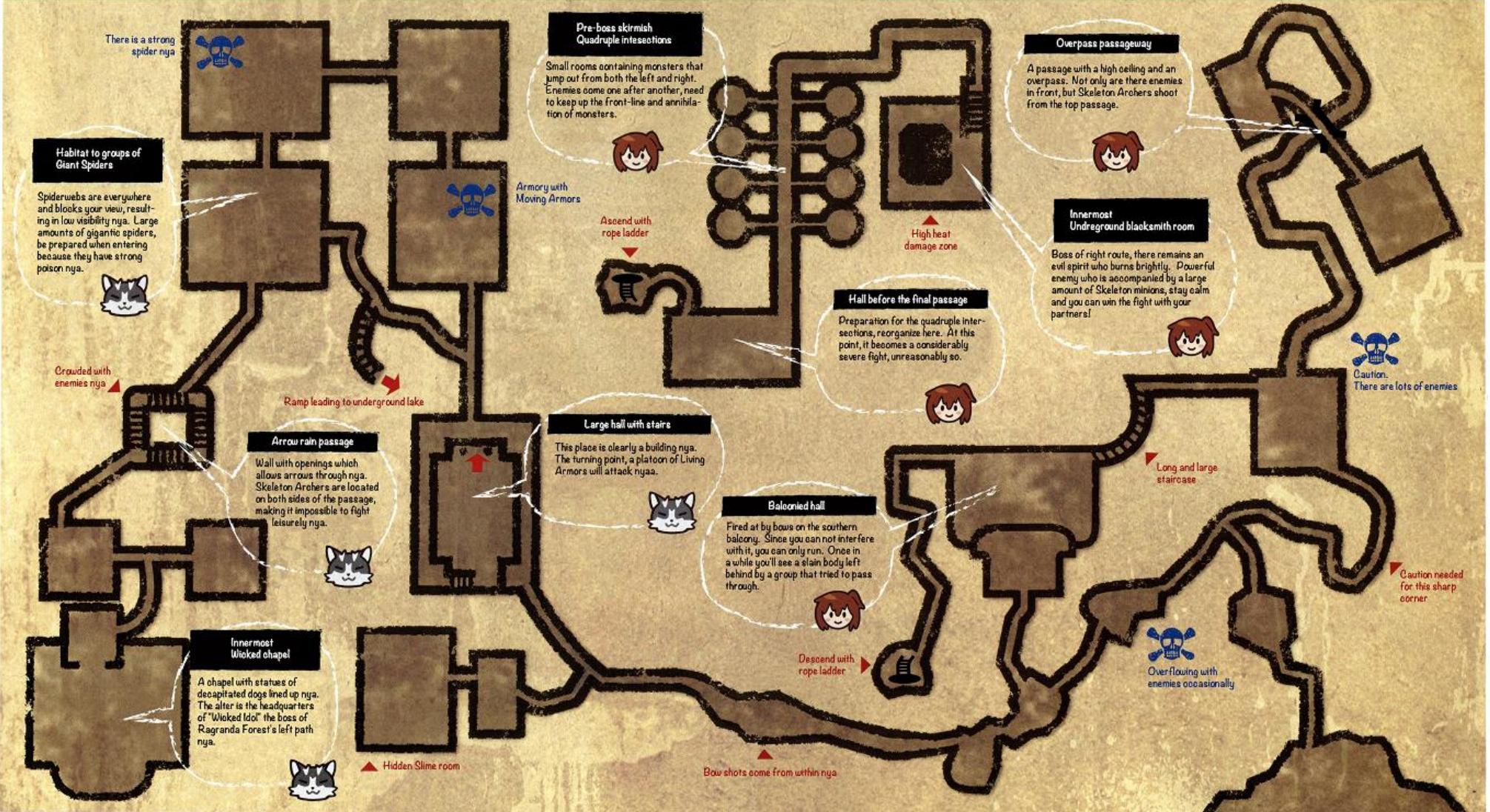
以下続刊

▶ログ・ホライズン 1 異世界のはじまり

▶ログ・ホライズン 2 キャメロットの騎士たち

以下続刊







LOG HORIZON

ログ・ホライズン

Fragrant green winds blow across this new, yet somehow old land. The imaginary world of Theldesia is home to dragons and giants, monsters and demihumans. With a burden weighing upon your soul, go forth, O winged one <Adventurer>! This land spreads out before you like a blank page; make your mark in it!

3 ゲームの終わり【上】 橙乃まれ

014



▲CHAPTER.1
魔術忍伝
TO SUMMER CAMP

080
ラグランダの杜
FOREST RAGRANDA



080

140



▲CHAPTER.3
古面魔導の交渉
NEGOTIATION IN THE ANCIENT COUR



▲CHAPTER.3
古面魔導の交渉
NEGOTIATION IN THE ANCIENT COUR

198

▲CHAPTER.4
森羅変転
ワールド・フラクション
WORLD FRACTION



198

▲CHAPTER.5

襲撃
EATACK

258



330
あとがき
AFTERWORD

▲卷末付録 1
「ヘルダー・テイル」モンスター・ファイア
ログ・ハイイン用語集

▲卷末付録 2
「ヘルダー・テイル」モンスター・ファイア
ログ・ハイイン用語集

328 320

ミノリ



中学生巫女

トウヤ



サムライ少年

にゃん太



ご隠居コック

「エルダー・テイル」をはじめてすぐ「大災害」に遭遇。シロ工に救出されるまで、凶悪ギルドに虐げられていたが、そもそもは芯の強い少年。ミノリとは双子の姉弟。

责任感の強い性格で、活発で無茶をしがちな弟トウヤの世話をやく。しかし双子として、戦士職のトウヤと回復職のミノリは息のあったコンビネーションを見せることも。



▲円卓会議に集結したギルドマスターたち

アカツキ

美少女暗殺者



以前は女性であることを隠し、寡黙な男性としてプレイしていたが、ゲームの世界に飲み込まれたあとは現実世界と同じ姿を取り戻し、小柄な淑女の姿 (暗殺者) としても活動を開始。

直継

おばんつ戦士



シロ工の親友で頼れる「守護戦士」。〈放蕩者の茶会〉出身の陽気でタフな青年。一時「エルダー・テイル」を休止しており、復帰当日にゲーム世界に閉じ込められた。

シロエ

腹ぐろ眼鏡



伝説のブレイ集團〈放蕩者の茶会〉で参謀役を務めていた思索派の「付与術師」。歴戦の古参ブレイヤーであるが、中身は引きこもりぎみのハードコアゲーマー大学生。

オンラインゲームの世界に閉じ込められ、1ヶ月。「アキバ」は、すんだ空気をまとい続けていた。

シロ工の教え子たる双子トウヤとミノリも劣悪な境遇を強いられていると分かって、自らの意思で行動することを避けた。したがつに覺悟を決める。——それは「アキバ」の街そのものを変える決意。

シロ工は「アキバ」を代表する12ギルドを招集し食料情報をエサに脅しともいえる大胆な手法で、街を変える必要性を訴えた。

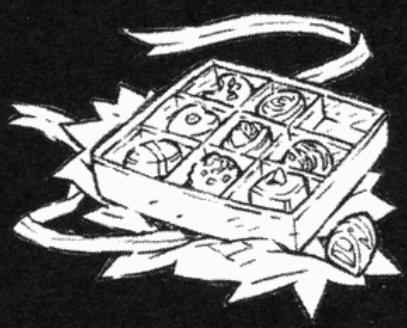
結果として、11ギルドが「アキバ」に「法」を制定することに同意。「アキバ」を自治する「円卓会議」も結成された。



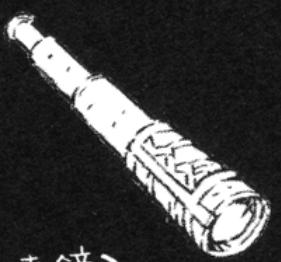
〈釣竿〉
食料自給と娛樂を兼ね備えた
魔法の棒。



〈メイド服〉
そらの少女を超生命体メイドに
変身させるマジック・アイテい。



〈チョコレート〉
「おの子に貢えれば
魔王だつて倒せるぞ！」



〈望遠鏡〉

偵察のためには重要!
ふらちな使用は禁止だぞ。

Prologue

The hunter stopped in his tracks, concentrating on the far-away cries of birds.

While listening to the wind in the mountains, what he heard was the approaching footsteps behind him.

There was nothing strange, just the footsteps of the hunter's student.

"...too, too fast... huff, huff... Master you are too fast."

"Catch your breath."

The student complained, though he was still growing, his frail body trembled from fatigue.

He was now 14, and had been training for 1 year.

Compared to the hunter who had been doing this for 30 years, he was still a young hatchling.

It was not the difference in body strength. In fact, if you compared pure physical abilities, this beardless youth might be stronger than this old man who was nearly 50 with graying hair... The hunter thought.

In short, there was a technique in hiking.

The way to shift your center of gravity, looking for stable footholds, the length of your strides, your body movements.

There were techniques in all areas, not grasping them would result in unnecessary loss of stamina.

The mountaintop was different from the village, it was a cruel place, not meant for humans to enter. Differing from the villages suitable for human use, man in this lush green world was just another living thing, forced to fight in the same conditions as other animals.

In this cruel world, if you used up all of your strength, the only thing that awaited you would be death. Just surviving was a challenge in the deep mountains.

But this only applied to People of the Land.

For Adventurers who had limitless stamina, this was not the case. The hunter saw an Adventurer younger than his student humming a song while running effortlessly up a steep hill.

This incident made him realize that they were a different kind of being.

The hunter was different from the villagers, opting to live in the mountains. He was moving into his twilight years, but in his village, he had a reputation as a strong and powerful man.

With his thick and powerful limbs, along with his sturdy jaw line, he had the air of an experienced master. In fact, he had never lost a drinking match or a fight with anyone before.

The panting youth beside him also aspired to be a hunter because of his exploits. Being able to hunt for deer and boars to provide the village with valuable meat just by hiking up the mountain, this was an important profession for the cold village.

And because of this, he understood his limits.

No matter what happened, he could never win against Adventurers. They were like a hurricane or an angry storm, almost as if a dragon (which the hunter had never seen before) was compressed into the size and shape of a human being.

"Let's move."

The man said indifferently and started walking.

A groan for sympathy came from behind him, but he ignored it. He was also trained in a similar way by his master. To learn the techniques in hiking, he needed to experience it himself. If he gave up so easily, he wouldn't be able to grasp the technique. The youth's load was only half of what the hunter was carrying anyway.

Bypassing the forest, and moving towards the ridge of the mountain.

He maintained a rhythm in his steps out of habit, and appeared to be walking casually. But the hunter's eyes were always carefully scanning the vegetation. Their travel routes were not the same as the deer's and boars', but you still needed to maintain your vigilance to be a hunter.

It was summer now, and the mountain was full of life, with the bears coming out of hibernation. He wanted to avoid meeting them.

"Mas... Master, where are we going?"

"The east mountain ridge."

The mountain they were traversing was known as the Awyu mountain, a vast zone in the crescent island of Yamato. But the unnamed village the hunter lived in was surrounded by mountains. Mountains were just all around them, they would not differentiate which was which, they were all just mountains to them.

The streams with monkeys, the mountain peaks with boulders, the giant trees on the ridges... in technical terms they understood, naming places by their land marks was enough for them.

The hunter planned to reach the ridge with kite rocks, then make a detour to the streams.

But judging from the youth's condition, he might have to alter the plan. The hunter planned to stay on the mountains for a week anyway, and had made preparations to do so.

(Since we won't be accomplishing much today, I should teach him some basic skills.)

The hunter decided quietly to make just the ridge his objective for the day, and he relaxed his emotions.

Even if he did not have a strong bow like the hunter, the youth still had a working short bow. It would do him good to work on his marksmanship in the mountain for the time being. The youth seemed to be practicing in the village, but no matter how good he was there, it would be all for naught if he couldn't do that in the mountains.

Skills learned by shooting at strawman targets on the even ground was just child's play.

You had to practice on the mountain and shoot downwards into the valley, taking out prey hiding in the bushes with only its head protruding out, or it would be meaningless.

The hunter's breath was short and curt, the youth panted loudly behind him.

He hacked away the branches with his knife occasionally as he made his way up.

On the mountains, you couldn't go directly up towards your destination. The ability of man in opening up new paths in the wild was limited, if they didn't take the route they could travel on, they wouldn't be able to go anywhere. Even though they were hiking upwards, they would need to go the long way around or even walk downhill.

Amateurs might feel frustrated by the constant change in directions, and maybe lose their sense of direction. The forest enveloping the two was very deep, the untamed wild forest could even block their view of the horizon.

But the hunter used his years of experience and his keen senses to make steady progress to the ridge.

The hunter noticed the abnormality and stopped.

"Master, what is the matter?"

"Shhh..."

The hunter stopped the youth, holding out his palm towards him. He changed his casual pace and moved up to the ridge swiftly, even barging through the thick undergrowth. He reached a position where he could see the ridge of the neighboring mountain.

With the rugged mountain surface akin to a wrinkled table cloth, you couldn't gaze afar from a high vantage point, but the angle from this position was just right.

You could see the stream flowing, and the restricted upper river zone.

Beyond their view was what the hunters call 'Monkey Stream', it was one of the wider streams in this region. Including the boulder and the bank of the stream, it carved a line through the lush green mountain and split endlessly down.

"That is..."

The youth stopped midway.

Because he did not know how to describe this scene.

That was only natural, because the hunter who was 3 times his age and 30 times more experienced than him was also seeing this for the first time.

The stream bank was jam packed.

It was full of certain black, rough, and squirming beings.

It was alive.

Because the distance was too far, the number too large, it could not be seen clearly, but it was obvious that they were living things. They were not demi-humans, and they were marching in great numbers downstream.

From the number, they were not only traveling down the river, but also in the surrounding forest as well hidden by the trees. He was unable to see them clearly, but the forest was probably full with a terrifying army of creatures as well.

The hunter stared at the scene as if he had lost his soul.

This was a crushing end, a sense of impending destruction.

No matter what the creatures were, the hunter was certain that there was nothing he could do to stop them.

Even if he were an Adventurer.

The army continued its march beyond the view of the hunter... a restricted zone named by the hunters as 'Seven Falls'. Their overwhelming numbers made the two of them stare at this scene for a very long time.

CHAPTER.



TO SUMMER CAMP

[夏季合宿へ]

► NAME: ISUZU

► LEVEL: 24

► RACE: HUMAN

► CLASS: BARD

► HP: 1778

► MP: 1832

► ITEM 1:
[HOWLING SPEAR]

MAGICAL-CLASS ITEM OBTAINED FROM KOBOLD LEADER. THE "HOWLING" PREFIX INCREASES THE DAMAGE OF BARD'S SPECIAL SKILLS SLIGHTLY.

► ITEM 2:
[WALNUT DECORATED HAT]

AN ACCESSORY THAT DROPS FROM THE MOB <NUTS EATER>, WHICH APPEAR IN THE QUEST "A TUNER'S WORRY". ITS FASHIONABLE COLOR MATCHES ISUZU'S TASTES. THE DEFENSE IT PROVIDES IS A BIT LOW THOUGH.

► ITEM 3:
[CRESCENT MOON LUTE]

STRINGED INSTRUMENT CRAFTED BY MARIELLE WHO IS A WOOD-CRAFTER, IT RESEMBLES A GUITAR. ONE OF THE HAND-MADE ITEMS PREPARED BY THE MEMBERS OF THE CRESCENT MOON ALLIANCE FOR THE RUNAWAY BEGINNERS FROM HAMELIN. ISUZU USES IT ALMOST EVERY DAY.

<table width=60%><tr><td width=20%; valign="top">Name: Isuzu

Level: 24

Race: Human

Class: Bard

HP: 1778

MP: 1832 <td>Equipment

Howling Spear
 Magical-class item obtained from Kobold Leader. The "Howling" prefix increases the damage of Bards special skills slightly.

Walnut Decorative Hat
 An accessory that drops from the mob Nuts Eater, which appear in the quest "A Tuner's Worry". Its fashionable color matches Isuzu's tastes. The defense it provides is a bit low though.

Crescent Moon Lute
 Stringed instrument crafted by Maryele who is a Woodcrafter, it resembles a guitar. One of the handmade items prepared by the members of the Crescent Moon Alliance for the runaway beginners from Hamelin. Isuzu uses it almost every day.

Chapter 1 To Summer Camp

Part 1

According to the lore of the world, a black stone film covered the soil and several flourishing cities were built on top of it. But maybe it was a reaction to being suppressed for too long, nature, once it broke out onto its surface, invaded the urban cities.

This world was based on Japan, but the vegetation had incredible vitality. That's why the lush grass seemed to sprout from everywhere, and trees were so tall that it looked like a tunnel when you looked up.

Among the gaps of the growing plants, you would not only see black soil.

There were signs of tar roads everywhere, which showed that this forest trail used to be a road from the ancient lore.

The sun pierced through the barrier of leaves and left shadows on the ground. This tunnel seemed to go on forever.

But because of this, the scene beyond the trees was even more beautiful.

"Wah!"

Minori couldn't help herself and shouted happily.

The 30 or so comrades with her reacted the same.

"Yah Hah! So cool! So cool so cool so cool!"

Her brother Tohya rushed forward, as his horse shifted from a slow walk to a gallop down the slope.

The wind with the taste of the tides blew up the slope, towards Minori and the others. The lush greenery extended from the slope all the way to the beach.

What was this big river in front of them called?

On the other side of the beach was a hill, with several windmills built close together, not sure if it was operational or in ruins.

The beach was like a snow white line sparkling in the sun.

From the distance of 10 kilometers away, you could only see the flickering shine, you could not make out any details.

"Alright alright! We need to reach there before we can do anything. If we don't find our camp site soon, we won't be able to eat dinner!"

"That's right the whole lot of you, you won't be able to keep up with the trip if you miss any meals!"

Maryele said and Naotsugu added teasingly.

The beginners cheered happily, mounted the horses which they didn't have the chance to ride in the forest trail and moved down the slope in two rows.

This was the Sand Leaf zone.

In the real world, this was centered around the Boso peninsula.

Using the 'Half-Gaia Project', shrinking the proportions of the real world by half, the distance was roughly 50 km from Akiba. They had been traveling in this abandoned world for 3 days.

"Minori-cchi, still doing okay nya?"

"I'm... I'm still fine!"

The tall and thin figure blocking the sunlight that pierced through the trees was Nyanta from the same 'Log Horizon' guild as Minori. He squinted his gentle eyes and Minori hurriedly replied to him positively.

Turning to face the front, the guardian leading the group Naotsugu was also looking this way and he waved at Minori signaling her to relax. Surrounded by her guild members, Minori felt safe.

Minori reaffirmed the fact that joining a guild like Hamelin and here were totally different matters.

But this group was not entirely composed of Log Horizon members, and was a mixture of many different guilds with a total of 60 people.

Including Oceanic Systems, Black Sword Knights, West Wind Brigade, etc., Akiba's top guilds had assigned people to participate.

This was the main party with 35 people, but an advanced party had already arrived at the destination. They planned to meet them there soon.

The reason Minori's group was in this training camp was because of Maryele.

Minori was not present, but from what her friend Isuzu said, this was what happened.

'...I want to go to the beach, want to eat shaved ice, ramen, and curry rice at the beach, I want to eat means I want to eat! Can we go? We can't? We really can't? I want to go to the beach! Let's go...!'

Crescent Moon Alliance master Maryele proposed in this way.

(I can roughly guess the situation then...)

Minori was in the guild Log Horizon, but before joining, she lived in the Crescent Moon Alliance guild hall for a short while. At that time, Minori had just escaped from the evil guild Hamelin (which had since been dissolved), and was busy the few days right after.

Crescent Moon Alliance members were very kind to her during her time there. Headed by Maryele, Henrietta, Shouryuu and the other members took care of her. Maryele saying such willful words and Henrietta's frowning face, this was a common sight in the guild hall, Minori could imagine it easily.

(She must have been waving her hands and feet around on the couch.)

Minori smiled as she pictured Maryele hugging her cushion and shaking her legs.

Having such feelings was unavoidable.

Minori knew that many players still wanted to return to the original world, but this was not a wish that could be achieved simply through hard work. There had been no news of anyone finding any clues on how to solve this problem.

If you just wanted to survive here, you just needed some money. Since there were no places for you to expend your efforts, it was no wonder the players were all bored out of their minds.

So even if anyone wanted to take a summer vacation, no one would stop them... probably.

But Maryele and the Crescent Moon Alliance were in a special position. In June, Shiroe proposed the formation of the Round Table Council to govern the various issues in Akiba. Crescent Moon Alliance was one of the 11 members of the council and guild master Maryele was also one of the senators.

After the founding of the Round Table Council, Akiba's trending topic was centered on revolution and they were the ones leading it.

It would be fine if the elected senator took a couple days off, but it would be troubling if the vacation lasted for weeks. The Round Table Council had only been in operation for 2 months, there was new information coming in daily, now was the time to appreciate the progress in Akiba.

With Oceanic Systems taking the lead, the 3 major production guilds' steam engine experiment was coming to an end. The original design used burning coal, but had been refined to summoners controlling salamanders to provide heat. This made the device much simpler, a big technical breakthrough.

There was also the new grill box and water pipes for use in cooking. Clothes that were never seen before (mainly undergarments) were developed rapidly. There was even a giant onsen, these two months had been filled with a series of new inventions and discoveries.

But during this important period, if a senator left the city (in this case, for a vacation), it wouldn't be good for the council's reputation... But Maryele did not give up and thought of a plan together with Henrietta and Shouryuu.

The main topic was 'summer training camp for beginners'.

"The surrounding area seems to be farms nya."

Just as Nyanta said, along the slope of the small hills were trails cutting into farmland. Pumpkins, tomatoes, eggplants, cucumbers... the trees in the distance seemed to be fruit trees, the wind had a sweet aroma to it.

"Minori, look, these are pears, this is great!"

"Wait up Tohya!"

Tohya left the road and climbed up the stone wall as he shouted. How long had it been since she ate a pear? Minori couldn't recall, but it looked nice and delicious.

"Those are planted by the People of the Land, don't pick them!"

Minori warned Tohya as she thought about it.

A summer training camp for beginners.

In the end, rescuing the beginners from Hamelin was a personal decision executed by Shiroe and the others, it had nothing to do with the Round Table Council. They had also clarified with the public that Hamelin had been dealt with before the council was formed.

But 'providing aid to beginners' became an agenda for the Round Table Council anyway.

The reason the council approved Crescent Moon Alliance's request so fast was because out of the 35 rescued beginners, 19 of them were in Crescent Moon Alliance and it was even known as the beginners training guild.

But not all the beginners from Hamelin joined the Crescent Moon Alliance. Some of them wanted to go into production and joined the corresponding guilds.

There were also beginners who did not join Hamelin, who were lucky in a sort of way, and joined the various other guilds in Akiba.

Since the training camp was approved by the council, it wouldn't be fair if applications were not open to the public. With this decision, all beginners whose location was known received an invitation to participate. Notices were also put out announcing 'In order to support beginners below level 40, a summer training camp will be organized.'

As it came to this, the prestige of the guilds came into question.

There were also opinions that since this was a Round Table Council-approved event, they couldn't just leave everything for Crescent Moon Alliance to handle.

Sending beginners to participate but not taking part as a camp leader... Some senators felt that they couldn't do this with their position in Akiba. If it

was a guild with tens of members, it should be acceptable, but if their member numbers were in the hundreds, it would be shameful to not send one or two members as camp leaders.

The guilds not only sent their members as support, but also provided all sorts of food and clothing. There was even a donation event, canvassing for equipment suitable for beginners after they level up.

As they proceeded with the preparations, the camp grew to the size of 60 people... This was what Minori heard from Isuzu about the training camp.

The slope gradually flattened out and the group moved into the abandoned ruins that was a city during the ancient times. The surrounding area should have been a residential neighborhood back then. Compared to the concrete high-rise buildings, the wooden houses deteriorated much faster.

With no obvious sign of concrete debris, there were only a few decaying residential structures which were covered by thick vegetation.

The peninsula of Sand Leaf was made up of forests, mountains, hills, and the uneven grounds. It was a place filled with the feeling of Mother Nature.

The river that was right in their field of vision was the Sand Leaf River, which flowed into the blue sea. In the real world this was a place called Choshi. Even in this alternate world, the Pacific Ocean in August was so clear and blue that you could see the bottom, it was beautiful, like the merging of the sky and blue sea.

Reaching the riverside, there were a few houses over there.

If you looked around there were several such houses along the river banks. Her lively brother who went to scout around reported that these houses seemed to be able to let boats dock there.

It was close to the coastline, there should be fishermen who went out to catch fish that were pushed by the river flow.

Keeping the boats away from the river mouth, they wouldn't be damaged even if there were raging waves, probably the wisdom of the fishermen. Maryele said that People of the Land who worked as fishermen lived near the riverbanks, if you walked upstream there would be a mid-sized town.

Minori's group left the riverside, made a detour around the dense forest and reached a pond roughly 500 meters wide. Beside the pond was a structure that was rare in this zone, a relatively new abandoned concrete structure.

"Woah! This is a school!"

Just as Tohya said, this should be a school in ancient times. Looking at it again with this in mind, the flat ground in front should be a field for sports. The wire fence around it was long gone but there were still signs of it having been here.

"Okay..! Everyone! From today onward, this will be the place we will sleep in! We will split into the 3 teams as previously arranged, we will be cleaning 3 classrooms. That is the 3 rooms on the east end of the 1st floor, with 20 people living in each room... If we can spare the time, we will continue cleaning tomorrow as well, let's make this a comfortable place to live in!"

As if on cue, the advance party members came out of the school and started working together with the beginners.

"Dinner tonight will be BBQ on the field! So please make do with bread for now. And also... Team 3 and people with the chef subclass, follow me for grocery shopping at the town! Remember to greet the town chief properly and be courteous. We leave in 30 minutes, start the battle!"

Everyone responded to Maryele's cheer in high spirits and started setting up the training camp site.

Part 2

Maryele and the food transport party walked along the farm trail with the loud sounds of cicadas.

The beginners she was leading displayed their 'summoning flutes' proudly and prominently on their necks or waists. This was an item to summon horses. There were different kinds of flutes and the ones they had could only call forth a low quality horse, and were restricted to only a few hours use per day.

But this was a precious magical item for beginners, as they caressed it gently and protectively with their fingers.

They were donated items distributed to them at the start of the trip.

Maryele and the others were traveling to the neighboring town on foot.

On their way there, they could see People of the Land working on their farms.

Maryele didn't want to alarm them with a large group of people, so they were moving at a casual speed.

Everyone owned a summoning flute and they would be riding on their way back with their groceries. But it was only 3 km from the campsite to the town and walking would take just an hour, so Maryele wanted to scout out the area at the same time.

"Hmm... Smells good!"

The sweet fragrance of the pears surrounded the area.

"That's right nya, if there are nice pears I hope we can get some nya."

"You are right, I want to eat pears!"

Nyanta was with the group as the head chef, with Serara tagging along. When Minori heard this she nodded her head politely. The few beginner chefs were also commenting on the quality of the fruits as they passed the farm.

Bathing under the summer light, the tomatoes and eggplants shone like jewels, the tomatoes were rubies, the eggplants were gemstones. Both of them looked solid and ripe, their condensation sparkling brightly.

Using the old cooking methods, there was no need to be concerned about the quality of the ingredients. Even ingredients that were small, dry, or even starting to turn bad, if you could identify it as the correct ingredient through the game menu, it would not affect the final product.

Tomato salads made with fresh or dried up tomatoes were absolutely the same, even the tasteless soggy cracker flavor was identical.

But if the chef used their own skills to cook food manually, they would need to pay attention to the ingredients they used. If they used a rotting tomato to cook, no matter how good the chef was, the food would still be bad. The skills of the chef were important, but it required the use of fresh and pretty ingredients to complement it.

"I want to use this to bake pizza!"

"Making them into ketchup should be nice too."

With this fact in mind, the beginner chefs moved on as they kept their eyes full of interest on the field.

Noon had just passed, there were People of the Land taking breaks in the shade after their lunch all over the place. The group waved at them sometimes, asking them about the vegetables sometimes, and even making arrangements to buy some on the way back.

Charasin of the 8th District Shopping Center had already informed the town about the training camp. The news must have spread around, the farmers were all very nice and kind.

"Seems like this will be a comfortable vacation♪"

Maryele said cheerfully, but Nyanta corrected her "This is a summer training camp nya." Marylene's true intent for the trip had already spread among the other members, but Nyanta still had the obligation to advise her as a senior.

But the advice was not from the heart, and more on the level of a punchline.

The town was situated near the Sand Leaf River.

It was some distance away from the riverbank, maybe as a precaution against floods.

The land in this area was relatively flat. The slightly undulating ground seemed to have been divided into individual squares, to be used for vegetables, paddy fields and fruit farms. The squares were further divided into smaller sections and you could see sheds and warehouses. They reached the inner part of the town eventually.

This was not a town you read about in Middle Ages knight tales, with fences, or militia walls protecting the town.

In the town center, wide tar roads and drains ran in parallel, giving it the feel of the national roads of the old world. Many houses made from wood or stone stood along either side of the road. There were few ancient towers

that were abundant in Akiba, while only the giant warehouses by the river were similar to them.

There were 5 or 6 shops with signboards on the streets.

Maryele heard from Shiroe who described the villages he encountered while doing his Susukino quest, but he did not mention any shops.

Farmers were basically self-sustaining. Villages with livestock and farmland formed their communities and they helped each other.

You did not need gold living in such a place, so there was no need to set up facilities such as shops. At least that was what Henrietta explained.

But this Choshi was more like a town than a village, so shops had a reason to exist.

"Hmmm, this place... is more stylish than I imagined."

Nyanta commented in a quiet voice.

This place could not be compared to Akiba, but there should be a few thousand People of the Land living here right? This was what this town made them feel.

Maryele stopped in the middle of the road and gathered the group around her. Maryele had the reputation of being friendly and taking care of others. But she felt more like a big sister now and she was comfortable with that.

"Let me think, hmmm, what should we do, the groceries... I will leave that to Chief Nyanta. And, I remember your name is Lukisea? Here is some money, everyone split into two groups, decide among yourselves what you need to buy, you have the shopping list?"

"Of course nya." Nyanta accepted the task.

Maryele nodded and checked the contents of her Bag of Holding, confirming that she had brought the greeting gift. As a matter of courtesy, she needed to visit and greet the mayor. Her eyes wandered around the group.

Since this was just a greeting, there was no need to bring too many people, but bringing a person or two along to back her up should be okay.

As Maryele considered who she should bring, her eyes met with Minori.

(She looks reliable, so why not?)

Before Maryele asked, Minori already expressed her willingness to come along.

(This girl has keen instincts too.)

And so everyone went about their task.

Nyanta would head to the harbor, the warehouses at the riverside seemed to be selling seafood. Since Maryele and the others were Adventurers, they had less chances to see sea cuisine, they would be pleased to eat these.

"Let's move out."

"Okay, time to greet the mayor!"

Not sure if it was her nature, or if she really was a middle-schooler like she claimed, Minori was excessively tense and her back was straight as if she was marching in a band. Maryele rubbed her hair roughly.

(Even though she is now with Shiro-bou, she is still a nice kid... Hmm, seems I missed out on a quality member.)

"May... May I ask..."

"What is it, Minori?"

"Why are you patting my head?"

"That is because I want to pat you♪"

Maryele smiled to appease Minori who was pouting slightly. The two of them were like sisters with a big age gap walking along the streets.

On their way there, the two of them asked a housewife who was carrying goods where the mayor lived. They found out that the mayor lived in a 2-story mansion at the junction ahead, he was a 70 year-old man who was kind and friendly, so there was nothing to worry about.

"Just greeting him should be enough, right?"

"Yes, just present a gift after greeting him..."

Maryele listed out the things she needed to say.

In her Bag of Holding was a barrel of peach wine. It was almost 100kg, not something Maryele could carry, but thanks to this magical bag, she felt no weight at all.

She also needed to explain to the mayor... They would be staying at the ruins for about 2 weeks, the place was about 5km from the town, and it shouldn't cause any problems. But they would be here to resupply every few days.

"Yes, we need to greet and build a relationship with them and ask about how to purchase the ingredients. If we only buy from a single farm, it could cause conflicts in this town..."

"Ah, you are right."

"Anyway, we should be fine if we follow the mayor's instructions. The next will be chatting... I want to gather information around this area."

"Information... right?"

"Right."

Maryele nodded in response.

The world had changed since the Catastrophe, NPCs were now People of the Land. Strictly speaking, the players did not know if the functions of Elder Tales were still working.

The People of the Land working in the market and banks were still at their posts, but just like the Round Table Council wanted to hire administrators, some People of the Land also wanted to do different jobs.

If you inferred from this discovery, Elder Tales' important quest system might not be working anymore.

Quests were challenges players took on and cleared to progress the story line of Elder Tales. For example, Choshi might have quests like 'Eliminate all the ghosts in the neighboring fields' or 'Escort fisherman to an island to fish'.

Some quests were started from secret items or locations, but most of them were in the form of an NPC request.

The quest givers which were NPC's were now People of the Land, was the quest system still in place? This was a serious question, because if the quest givers happened to be People of the Land who died, the quest would be gone forever.

(...This is what Shiroe is worried about), Maryele also understood the danger behind this.

When Elder Tales was just a game, there were some basic quests available to all players.

The Bag of Holding was the reward for one of those quests, Maryele and all the other experienced players loved this bag, it was very convenient.

But if this quest was gone forever because of any reason, all the beginners wouldn't be able to acquire this bag, which would cause serious problems.

"Shiro-bou always pays attention to all the details, so he requested that I do all I can to gather data, anything related to Choshi and the People of the Land. As you can see, I don't know a lot of things."

"Oh I see... you are right."

Minori nodded with an enlightened look.

"I wonder what Shiroe-san is doing right now."

"Shiro-bou might be gathering intelligence in his own way, but maybe..."

Maryele remembered something and laughed.

"He might not have the time to do that."

Part 3

The performance by the quartet of string instruments was elegant and classy.

The vast hall was beautifully decorated. It was filled with laughter from the ladies and whispers from the gentlemen, but only about 40% of the guests were here.

People gathered around the couches near the walls or the snack tables, leaving the center of the hall empty.

There was still some time before it began.

Banquets such as this usually started later than planned, even more so for the party of nobles. After confirming this with a waiter, he sighed softly.

(Seems we acted like bumpkins.)

Never having attended parties like this before, there was no way Shiroe could have known about this. Due to his sorrowful inexperience, he arrived earlier to be polite, but instead caused the opposite effect.

Shiroe's group had no choice but to gather near the wall and drink.

This was the 'Ancient Palace of Eternal Ice'.

According to the game lore, this palace which was 2 hours ride away from Akiba was built by the Alv during the ancient times. In the Elder Tales world, the ancient Alv were extinct. They had immense magical powers and all sorts of technology, but failed to withstand the flow of time. The only evidence of their existence was the half-Alv race, one of the 8 races available for selection by the players.

Situated in southern Tokyo of the real world, Minato district. The 'Ancient Palace of Eternal Ice' had no distinct owner, and was ruled commonly by the nobles of the 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal'

....League of Freedom Towns Eastal.

This was the alliance that ruled over an area equivalent to the eastern mainland of Japan. Elder Tales divided the Japanese servers into 5 territories.

The real world Hokkaido was 'Ezzo Empire'.

Shikoku was 'Fourland Dukedom'.

Kyushu was 'Ninetails Dominion'.

Eastern main island was 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal'.

Western main island was 'Holy Empire Westelande'.

In the end, in the hopes that the players would enjoy a variety of different adventures, they showcased the native culture and art unique to each region.

This included 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal' in the eastern Japan mainland, which was a country made from the alliance of different cities. They had 20 such fiefdoms united to rival the 'Holy Empire Westelande'.

Compared to what Shiroe understood of real Japan, the population in this world was small even if you included the fact that the People of the Land increased 10-fold in number since the game became their reality.

In this world with monsters roaming about, the territory of man was very small. Compared to modern Japan, 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal' was like an undeveloped wilderness, just a bubble of safety in this world.

Even if the population were small, there should be about 2 million People of the Land in the whole Japan server.

'League of Freedom Towns Eastal' only had influence over the eastern main island, but they still needed a political system of governance.

'League of Freedom Towns Eastal's' governing organization was controlled by the nobles. Elder Tales was based on Middle Ages European fantasy world view, and the territory owners were known as nobles.

Landowners had their own castles, official residences, or official mansions, wearing crowns with capes or dresses, the typical wardrobe of the People of the Land nobles.

'League of Freedom Towns Eastal's' various landowners would gather at the 'Ancient Palace of Eternal Ice' once or twice a year to hold meetings to discuss all sorts of political issues. They would also use the chance to improve relationships with others and let their sons and daughters debut to the world as nobles. They would also conduct horse races or bring up marriage pacts with other nobles.

From a certain point of view this was an elegant culture. But on the other hand, the 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal' alliance was a necessity to help each other in the face of monsters.

Built in the southern part of Tokyo where Hama Rikyu Garden is, in this palace made with magical ice, the People of the Land used it as a social meeting venue for the nobles.

Shiroe just stood around with nothing to do in the 'Ancient Palace of Eternal Ice'.

"Hmm, that is quite spectacular, now I'm nervous."

Michitaka from the production guild Oceanic Systems said. This should be his true feelings, he commented on the facility and decoration of the palace without reserve.

"Just imagine that you are surrounded by monsters and you can stay calm."

The one replying was the battle guild D.D.D's leader... 'Berserker' Krusty. Contrary to his nickname, Krusty looked like a pale, intelligent, and handsome young man. He was in a well-tailored tuxedo today, which suited him very well.

"The only one who will be calm that way is just you."

Michitaka laughed in reply.

He was also wearing a tuxedo, looking just as dynamic or maybe even more so than Krusty. A tuxedo was a type of western clothing. It looked better on people with a big body type, a perfect fit for these 2 warriors.

One of them was the guild master of the biggest production guild in Akiba, the other was the biggest battle guild D.D.D, also holding the post of senate leader of Akiba's governing body, the Round Table Council.

Considering the purpose of this banquet, being dynamic was a good thing.

"That is right leader, only you will feel safe being surrounded by monsters."

Krusty's words were too wild, the tall and elegant lady standing beside him counseled him as she served him a glass of champagne. Shiroe recognized her as a D.D.D member, Takayama Misa.

After hearing about the dress code, they predicted that there would probably be dancing during the banquet. The three representatives concluded that there would be a need to bring a female partner along to this social event.

"...My lord."

The petite young girl standing beside Shiroe was also wearing a beautiful dress. She did not seem to be listening to the conversation between the two guild masters and was talking to Shiroe with fear from the bottom of her heart.

Shiroe lowered his gaze to Akatsuki.

Their height difference was about 30cm, so he could only see the top of her head if they were too close, an inconvenience.

But if he bent down to meet her eyes, Akatsuki would say: "My lord, don't treat me like a child!", so he could only give up.

"What is it?"

"Is, That is.... My appearance... it is weird right?"

Akatsuki asked with a voice like a mosquito, you wouldn't be able to imagine it with her normal attitude.

Shiroe didn't understand what she meant and was confused.

There was nothing wrong with Akatsuki. In fact, she looked absolutely stunning.

Her neatly combed hair, her petite body in a dress. The dress was pearl white, the bottom half of her long flying skirt was dyed in layers of Turkish blue, which gradually merged with the pearl white top.

The color combination contrasted well with her dark eyes and hair, giving her a pure and handsome feeling.

"Hnng..."

"It is not weird, in fact you look very cute, very pretty! Like a sweet and fresh loli strawberry! It makes people want to take you home, correction, I want to bring you home!"

(She actually asserted ownership!)

As Shiroe stressed over his reply, Crescent Moon Alliance's capable accountant Henrietta butted in. She bundled her blonde hair up high, with the nape of her neck in plain sight, just like a high class lady.

Henrietta had the appearance of a cold beauty and she preferred low-profile clothes that didn't complement her looks, but had a refreshing feeling and was well received by her fans. But looking at her formal dress tonight, you could not deny that she was better suited in high class and elegant clothes.

"Is... Is that so? I am unable to keep calm, the weapons are also hard to hide."

"Really, where did you take these kunai from?"

"My lord..."

Akatsuki hid behind Shiroe perplexedly.

She wanted to hide from Shiroe's view, but she didn't want to be away from him.

(Akatsuki takes the meaning of body guard too literally.)

Henrietta was concerned about Akatsuki, but she still moved elegantly. Shiroe asked if she had ever been to a dance party, she answered no. She looked calm on the surface, but that might be an act. But Shiroe thought she might just be too engrossed looking at Akatsuki to care about her surroundings.

The petite beautiful young girl that was like a sparrow, Akatsuki.

An intellectual and beautiful blond Henrietta.

Shiroe's companions for this trip were these two.

Why was Shiroe's group in the hall of 'Ancient Palace of Eternal Ice'? That was a long story.

One month earlier, in July. Akiba, revitalized with the revolution, had surprises popping up all over like popcorn.

The Round Table Council received a letter from the 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal', an invitation from the nobles. Their leader Sergead Corwen wrote in the letter apart from inviting the Round Table Council to join the 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal', they were also invited to the meeting and dance party at the 'Ancient Palace of Eternal Ice'.

'League of Freedom Towns Eastal' was an alliance formed by the nobles in the area corresponding to Japan's eastern main island. Akiba was one of the cities situated there.

According to logic, since Akiba had a governing body, 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal' would naturally contact them, which was what Shiroe expected.

The Round Table Council members gathered to meet immediately.

Shiroe and the Adventurers were invited by the People of the Land for the very first time. Even if this was within expectation, the meeting still had a tense atmosphere.

.... One of the governing organizations of this world, 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal', recognized the Round Table Council as one of them and wanted to establish diplomatic relations.

Round Table Council members discussed and analyzed the situation thoroughly.

How about accepting this invitation?

The intention of this invitation, should be for the 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal' to recognize the governing body of Akiba, Round Table Council, as a league member. In this situation, Akiba's territory owner (in this case, senate leader Krusty) would be given a title as a noble.

Not only that, there would be future invitations to meetings. The good thing was that this was a way to gather lots of intelligence on the People of the Land, and a way to communicate and negotiate with them. The bad thing was that we would be involved in the politics of the People of the Land.

What would happen if they rejected the invitation?

They would lose the benefits that came with accepting the invitation, which was a communication channel to negotiate with the People of the Land. They would take part in the league, but would not be involved in the turbulence of their politics.

Another con... Would this anger the nobles and push them to war? The council also debated on this possibility.

But from their discussion, the conclusion was that it was very unlikely.

Akiba was a player city.

Not only was their trading infrastructure in place, with so many Adventurers gathered, their military might was beyond question. Because of the advances of weaponry technology in the real world, the prowess of a single soldier would not be the factor in determining the outcome of a war.

But there was magic in this fantasy styled alternate world, the fighting prowess of individuals was a major factor in wars. In this world, victory in one-on-one duels would affect how the battle would play out, and also how the war would end. The People of the Land had vastly inferior fighting strength compared to Adventurers. Even for the citizens in dangerous frontier cities, citizens with level 20 were considered very high in level.

The majority of the farmers and hunters were at levels less than 10, merchants, house wives, and kids were only level 5.

But the People of the Land also had their own military forces.

Each landowner would have their own soldiers, cavalry and magicians, but they were small in number. From what Shiroe gathered, the elite of these armies were at about level 50-60.

Not only that, some People of the Land like the city guards had unique abilities. Their levels were not really higher than Adventurers', but their special equipment 'Moveable Armor' allowed them to protect specific city zones.

'Moveable Armor' was magically engineered armor, powered by the magic that was available around the city, giving them powerful combat abilities.

Other than that, some NPCs were also far stronger than them. In Elder Tales, they were called Ancients, Shiroe was not sure of their relationship with the other NPCs, but the People of the Land viewed the Ancients as one of their own.

The Ancients... leaving aside the game lore, they had a specific function in the game.

The People of the Land were set to be inferior to Adventurers in all aspects.

Adventurers could power up indefinitely through battles, and their strength would be stronger by tens of folds after constant leveling.

Even after receiving a fatal injury, they would not disappear forever, but respawn back at the cathedral. They could raid ancient ruins and loot powerful equipment and weapons, increasing their prowess even more.

In the eyes of the People of the Land, Adventurers were like a type of supermen.

This was correct in the game setting, in a character developing role playing game system, if all the characters were stronger than the player, it would be a source of shame and cause stress on the players.

From the view of the game developers, setting the People of the Land as the weakest had its uses. But some stories require a powerful People of the Land to be the companion of the player.

When Elder Tales was still a game, the countless story quests were one of its selling points. It could be the background story of an adventure, or come in a form of a quest, stories were scattered all around the world.

There were all kind of stories, and some of them needed heroes. For instance, something like 'please help that hero in trouble!'.

Since it was a game, the one who was rescuing was the player, but if the NPC that was saved had a level that was too low, it would affect the willingness to execute this quest.

Even though they had their advantages, the 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal' forces could not compare to Akiba's Adventurers.

The council was still hesitant on joining the 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal'.

Those who agreed based their argument on the lack of cons in joining. Joining would also open a communication channel with the People of the Land. Since there were few worries over the military threat, it was unlikely they would raise up unreasonable requests, so there were not many cons in joining.

For the opposition, their main question laid with the nobility title. Players accepting titles from NPCs and becoming one of them, this did not sit right with them.

After discussing all the points, they were trending towards joining the league.

It was obvious that those opposing did so out of emotion, not logic. But being emotional made things more troublesome than it should, and most players understood why they felt this way.

The Round Table Council thought about this point and put up notices in the central square. It mainly explained that the Round Table Council had decided to join the 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal' to exchange information with the other members of the league.

And when it was August, the Council chose and sent their representatives to the 'Ancient Palace of Eternal Ice'.

Part 4

The group reached the 'Ancient Palace of Eternal Ice' in the morning. The journey from Akiba was uneventful. It took only 2 hours, closer than Shinjuku Gyoen.

Shiroe's group numbered about 10 people.

A bigger group might cause the league to be wary, and so the group members were carefully selected.

No matter what, the first choice to go was the senate leader of the Round Table Council, 'Berserker' Krusty.

'League of Freedom Towns Eastal' had a deep rooted cultural system based on nobility and titles. Shiroe's group did not know how they would receive an organization like the Round Table Council. But since they were treating the nobles as equals, the Round Table Council must send their senate leader as well.

The next in line was the 2nd-in-Command of this team of envoys.

Krusty was the leader of the biggest battle guild D.D.D. And so to maintain balance and form, they should send someone from the production guilds as well.

Candidates were Oceanic Systems' boss 'Strong Armed' Michitaka, The Rodrick Firm's Rodrick, and 8th District Shopping Center's leader Charasin, but the 3 of them kept pushing this responsibility around.

After a short discussion, Michitaka from Oceanic Systems was chosen.

The 3 major production guilds were on good terms, each had their own unique points, forming the pillars that supported Akiba. But with all the new discoveries around the city, production players wouldn't want to leave the city, which was the hidden reason for their reluctance to take on the role.

Michitaka announced "Following the news reports of all the upcoming inventions is more interesting" and wanted to decline, but after losing the best out of 11 'rock paper scissor' match, he accepted the role. He tried convincing Charasin to take the job, but he failed.

Michitaka was a helpful person by nature, and he displayed the fortitude of a guild master of thousands, saying in an inspiring tone "Since there's no other way, leave everything to me". But he expressed begrudgingly later "If anything important happens, I will rush back to the city, it's just a 2-hour trip." This was a secret among the Round Table Council members.

For balance, someone who could analyze and put available data to use should be chosen as the 3rd representative. When the council came to this conclusion, all of them stared at Shiroe.

The senators that formed the Round Table Council were all leaders of their guilds as well. They had their own intelligence departments to gather and analyze information.

But Shiroe's display of tactics and strategy was still fresh on everyone's mind. The important thing was everyone still had the feeling 'you are the culprit behind the forming of the Round Table Council, take responsibility and do work'.

Shiroe was interested in the summer training camp that was taking place at the same time.

This was an event for the training of beginners, so Minori and Tohya from Log Horizon were also participating. Other than this, it was also a chance to gather intelligence from the villages around the border of Tokyo. Shiroe had occasionally gone out to investigate these past two months, but he still felt there was a serious lack of contact with the People of the Land.

He didn't want to give up on either activity, it gave Shiroe a headache. But Michitaka expressed "No, you need to come, I cannot allow just me leaving the city" and invited him passionately. Shiroe had no choice but to accept and be part of the palace visiting team.

Shiroe accepted the task from the Round Table Council as the 3rd in command of the ambassador party. Akatsuki announced before hand 'I will ensure my lord's safety' and followed Shiroe automatically. Instead of an attendant, she was more like a retinue.

On the other hand, Naotsugu and Nyanta were assigned as the camp leaders. Naotsugu and Nyanta had always taken good care of their juniors. They had plenty of fighting experience in the alternate world and were reliable in both live battle practice and handling any emergency situation.

Shiroe miscalculated. When Akatsuki decided to join the ambassador team, Crescent Moon Alliance's Henrietta who was also present decided to join in too.

Henrietta was taking part as 'Shiroe's attendant'.

This part was fine, but being Shiroe's attendant meant she would be in the same bedroom as Akatsuki. Henrietta was overjoyed by this prospect.

(...She is obviously in this for Akatsuki.)

Shiroe had nothing to say.

Shiroe didn't hate Henrietta. She was beautiful, smart and reliable. Shiroe had a good impression of her. But her abnormal passion turned Shiroe off. But in the eyes of the Round Table Council members who did not know about her hidden intentions, Shiroe seemed to enjoy the attentions of both a young maiden and a beautiful lady at the same time. Shiroe's claim that "That is not true" was rejected.

After rounds of selection, the members attending the 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal' banquet were decided. The ambassador team representatives were Round Table Council's senate leader Krusty, 1st deputy was Oceanic Systems' Michitaka, 2nd deputy was Log Horizon's Shiroe, with secretary and attendants accompanying, a total of 10 people.

(How should I say this... How uneasy.)

Shiroe recalled the selection process as he kept a low profile in a corner of the hall and mumbled to himself.

The number of guests in the hall increased gradually, Akatsuki hid behind Shiroe, Henrietta stood beside Shiroe with a bright smile.

"Shiroe-kun is amazing, showing no sign of unease."

Krusty mentioned this to Michitaka, but this was just a misunderstanding.

"That's normal for a hero like him. Hee, even in this grand event, with 2 such beautiful girls with him, he remains totally at ease, right?"

"That's rude, a party like this is the hunting ground for Pitch Black Shiroe-sama."

Michitaka understood the true reason but couldn't help teasing him. Shiroe decided he would take revenge later. Henrietta's praise seemed pretty misleading as well.

There was a reason for this.

After the formation of the Round Table Council, Henrietta's setting of Shiroe in her heart was 'an invincible scheming master and black-hearted tactician'.

If that was the case, he could dismiss it as a rant. But when she expressed that she had absolute trust in his black heart, it made Shiroe speechless.

He was not sure why Henrietta considered black heart to be an important quality. Shiroe was unable to dismiss her praise casually, which troubled him even more.

"Welcome everybody and thank you for coming."

Even so, he needed to say something to Henrietta. When Shiroe was about to speak, a man in a white cape with furry edges who was definitely a noble addressed Shiroe's group.

(Wah, this is serious... he is the real thing.)

Just as Shiroe was thinking of this, this elderly man who looked like the 'real thing', was a noble with a short beard and sharp eyes under his silver hair. His muscles lines were obvious because of his advanced age, but his

sturdy muscles suggested that he must have been active in the battlefield as a young man.

Dark blue shirt and pants with dark brown edges seemed to be summer clothes which didn't look thick or heavy, decorated with several metallic designs and fastened by a belt. He was wearing high class leather boots that were black and shiny.

"It is nice to meet you, thank you for inviting us, I am the representative of Akiba's governing body 'Round Table Council', known as Krusty."

(Krusty-san is so graceful and steady, just like a noble.)

Krusty responded smoothly, his expression showing no sign of retreat.

Michitaka introduced himself next, and also seemed to be smooth and at ease, in terms of courage, these 2 led the Round Table Council members in terms of fearlessness. Shiroe thought choosing them as representatives was the right choice.

"I am Shiroe, please take care of me."

Thinking about this, Shiroe introduced himself simply. This simple attitude seemed to be the opposite of nervous to the others. All present didn't see them as 'the fearless duo' but as 'the fearless trio', but Shiroe didn't notice this.

(I will introduce myself in detail later, I want to know his identity anyway.)

"I am Sergead Corwen, holding the position of director-general in the 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal'."

(So this man is... the man with the most authority in the east.)

Akiba was the largest player city in the Japanese server, but that doesn't mean it was the largest city.

The largest city on the Japanese server was the 'Maihama capital' which was centered around 'Castle Cinderella'.

In this alternate world, Tokyo had lost its function as a capital.

Compared to the real world Japan with a population of over 100 million people, the alternate world had only 1 percent of the populace.

People formed small communities everywhere, building walls to keep out threats, living in shelters like these. It was the same at the border of old Tokyo. Including Akiba and this palace, there were remnants of high technology and magical culture in the ruins. A few cities were built using these ruins as a base, the population was too sparse, it was impossible to manage and govern the whole zone.

The kind and gentle human race had lost their place as the main characters in this world, unable to maintain the influential range of ancient times.

Hence, the old capital was separated into several small cities that could defend themselves, with Maihama being the biggest.

(The second biggest is Akiba and the player city Shibuya. Ikebukuro has the tower of sunlight, so it is also very big. As for the alternate world counterpart for Shinjuku, the game lore said it was destroyed by an underground giant beast. So the next will be Yokohama and Asakusa which is far away... that's about it.)

That was the summary of the humans living in the Kanto region.

The elderly noble in front of them, was the ruler of the biggest city in the Kanto region, Maihama. There were no cathedrals in Maihama, so it was not a player city. But apart from that, the trading infrastructure in that city was all in place, and there were a large variety of quests available there. When Elder Tales was just a game, all mid to high-level players had visited it at least once.

The sky gardens and the stairs made from delicate steel pieces left a grand impression, and the landmark 'Castle Cinderella' was said to be the most beautiful, clean, and white palace in the whole of Japan's servers.

Krusty immediately continued the conversation with Sergead.

Krusty explained the make up of the Round Table Council, how it was made up of senators representing the citizens. He acted as the senate leader, and was happy to be part of this banquet.

"Yes, yes... I understand, put simply, guilds are like nobles without land, and your council is made up of powerful and influential guilds, governing through mutual consensus? This is a smaller scale of the 'League of

'Freedom Towns Eastal', which also gathers the nobles to discuss future actions and policies.

"That is correct."

Krusty nodded in response to Sergead Corwen's words.

"But if that is the case, hmmm..."

As an elf waitress passed by, Sergead took a glass from her to drink as he thought.

"Even if there is a senate leader, giving the title of the noble to just one person will cause unnecessary conflicts?"

"That is the case. If possible, please allow me to decline this offer."

"Hmm, but if this happens, our position will...."

"How about this, can you recognize the 'Round Table Council' itself as the equivalent of a noble, and bestow upon us the right to participate in your meetings? This way, we will be able to participate as equals."

This was Michitaka's suggestion. He had the calm air of an important person as he assisted Krusty in convincing this old noble.

(I feel that we have a big generation gap, but it seems to be going well.)

Shiroe remained a step behind, paying attention to the conversation between the three.

Krusty was definitely young, but Michitaka was probably less than 30 in the real world too. But they showed no signs of fear or unease while talking to the nobles of this world. Even if they failed in their negotiation, Shiroe entering the fray would not be of any help anyway.

"We are drawing a lot of attention."

Henrietta whispered into Shiroe's ear. Shiroe turned his head, and saw that a lot more guests had arrived, making the banquet more lively. From previous investigations, 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal' was an alliance of 24 cities.

Each city would have one representative, 2 advisers, 4-5 attendants. Some were bringing their children to debut in the social world, so the total should be a few hundred. From an estimate, about a hundred were present.

The spacious hall was decorated with red and gold, and didn't feel crowded even with so many people. There were groups chatting all over the vast hall, with many peeking over here. Shiroe could feel the gazes of the crowd.

(Even so, they are not coming over to chat... because of Sergead? Or maybe they have decided to do this beforehand. Or maybe they are discussing some weird news we don't know about?)

Shiroe thought slowly.

Just like Shiroe's council did not have all the intelligence regarding the 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal', they probably also had limited information on the Round Table Council as well.

The invitation letter was a good example.

The league had influence over their member cities, should they accept them and join the league? Or do they need to be wary and treat them with respect, or would they receive painful punishment? Both organizations did not understand each other well enough.

They wanted intelligence on each other, but they needed to be careful when conversing and gathering info, to avoid being taken advantage of.

So they needed a longer time to interact.

(Seems like this meeting will be a challenge.)

Shiroe closed his eyes and pressed his thumb between his brows. Krusty and Michitaka were doing all they could to negotiate, so Shiroe's responsibility was to find any gaps to cut in, but he had no good ideas so far.

Shiroe had put in a lot of effort before the trip to collect intelligence on the 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal', but that was only from city bars and books. The first-hand information of the nobles' social network rarely flowed out to the commoners.

The noises in the hall disappeared like a retreating tide, the people near the door separated to either side. A prominent group appeared from the door. In the midst of the crowd's gentle expectation and soft chatter, 3 ladies appeared with their male escorts.

Part 5

"This is my granddaughter Raynesia, she is turning 15 this year."

Duke Sergead squinted his eyes.

He reigned in the dignity and pride of a noble, replaced with the gentleness of a grandfather.

"You may not be familiar with our customs. When a lady reaches a certain age, she will debut in the social world at the banquet. The meeting starting tomorrow will last 10 days, and aside from handling all sorts of issues of the 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal', this will also be the place for us to socialize... We nobles use the military might and wealth that is accumulated daily to protect our territories, but that is not enough in this harsh world. No, we cannot guarantee that we will always be ready. Compared to swords, money, and walls, friends and families would serve better in protecting us and our citizens."

Maybe because he had slightly let down his guard, Sergead explained the meaning behind the noble social circles to Krusty and Michitaka.

"I understand, we also formed an organization like this with guilds, with comrades helping each other like family. Sometimes we will go beyond the invisible lines of a guild and help each other, that is the mission of the Round Table Council."

Michitaka answered.

"There are limits to the power of an individual."

Krusty continued.

These noble and stately words fit right in with this stately occasion.

"You are absolutely right."

Sergead found their words pleasing and smiled in return.

As Michitaka and Sergead looked towards the main attraction, the 3 young ladies just reached the center stage. The knights led them gently by the hand, all of them were handsome and manly.

"All of them are beautiful."

Michitaka expressed his thoughts.

This praise was very merchant-like, Michitaka was glad that he didn't need to lie out of courtesy this time.

The beautiful young lady that was stepping forward seemed younger than her age of 15. Her slender neck gave others an ethereal impression.

"The one in the middle is my granddaughter Raynesia, the one on the right with green hair is Marquis Lester's daughter Appletta from Owly. The girl with fiery red hair is the granddaughter of Freedom City Iwafune's Baron Sugana. The 3 of them are debuting in the social world this year."

(So that is how it works... The 3 of them are all beautiful young girls who will be ushered into the social world in this way.)

The music resumed under the stares of the crowd.

This should be their first time dancing in front of the crowd. But maybe they had gone through lots of training, their movements were smooth and graceful, although their facial expressions remained stiff.

The gentle string instruments and the new sound of wind instruments gave the music more depth. Shiroe found the music familiar, this was the opening soundtrack when you started up Elder Tales the game.

Only the 10 people in Shiroe's group felt the nostalgia and surprise from the music. As they looked at each other, their faces were covered in bitter smiles.

At the moment their eyes meet, all of them felt "I am really in an alternate world with no way to leave", a sense of loss. But they couldn't give in to emotions here, they had heavy responsibilities to bear.

As the music drew to a close, the princesses gracefully curtsied to thank the crowd.

"Next will be the 2nd piece... Please join us in the dance too."

"Ah?"

Michitaka gave a look of confusion in lieu of a formal question for the aging Sergead.

"I explained before right? This banquet is a socializing event before the meeting, look around you. Everyone is interested in your group, I'm just taking the lead for them as the representative. But they are on guard because they are not sure on how to socialize with Adventurers. If we maintain this status quo, we won't be able to exchange information properly, let alone mutual trust."

The old lord representing the 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal' said his piece, his majestic face showed a hint of mischief.

"Everybody wants to enjoy dancing with our guests. The young girl with black hair, how about it?"

Akatsuki who was suddenly questioned jumped as if she was shocked by electricity and hid behind Shiroe in a hurry.

"I am the shinobi of my lord, shinobi are like shadowy bodyguards, there is no...no...no way I can show myself in public!"

The duke gazed towards Michitaka next, but he had a face with cramps and shook his head: "No no no, I am very clumsy, so not me!"

Michitaka focused on production, but he had the strength of an Adventurer, he was so fast that when he shook his head he left afterimages, it looked very funny.

(Seems like the best candidate will be Krusty), Shiroe thought with a laugh.

Krusty had the scary nickname 'Berserker', but he looked intelligent and handsome.

He was best described as an American footballer who had a 'Strong body, talented, elite, stylish, glasses-wearing gentleman'. His position should be quarterback, a commander who was capable of breaking through the defensive lines himself.

With a muscular body, he looked good in a tuxedo, and had a female companion from the same guild accompanying him.

"It is time for Shiroe-kun to shine."

Before Shiroe could speak, Krusty suggested calmly. Shiroe wanted to ask if this was a joke, but Krusty who made the first move had a serious expression.

"I would like to talk with Lord Sergead for a while, considering Shiroe-kun's talent, what was mentioned just now... I remember, 'this party is like a hunting ground' correct? I hope you can contribute your skills for the sake of the Round Table Council."

(K...Krusty-san, you did that on purpose, right? S...Shit...)

The color was gone from Shiroe's face.

When faced with a high-level monster or a grand scale discussion in a meeting, Shiroe could manage to win. But he was a tactician-type of a person and preferred to prepare a detailed plan beforehand. In other words, he built his battles with tactics that were sure to succeed.

For instance, no matter how hard a problem was, Shiroe would come out with some sort of plan if he had 10 days of prep time. But if he were faced with a request all of a sudden, he would be dumbstruck.

But Krusty who was representing the Round Table Council had official business with the leader of the 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal', so asking Shiroe to cover the dance for him was within reason.

And add in the fact that Krusty and Michitaka had been holding the conversation the whole time while Shiroe did nothing. He was thinking hard on the future plans, but he had not found any good ideas yet. So when he was assigned this task, he could only accept it out of guilt.

(Haah... This is going to be embarrassing.)

Shiroe hung his head in depression. As he raised his head, he saw Henrietta smiling beautifully in front of him.

"Shiroe-sama, being depressed doesn't suit you."

"Even if you say that... This is something I can't do."

Shiroe who had given up sighed hopelessly, but Henrietta shook her index finger like a teacher.

"Guys cannot display their insecurity, even if you have to fake it, even more so for a guild master, right? Mary is slow and dense, putting it simply only her breasts are big... But she understands this rationale."

As she said, Maryele smiled even when things were hard, cheering her members on to this day. Shiroe reflected on his actions.

Using his intellect to consider all details was a good thing, but Shiroe also realized his weakness lay in worrying unnecessarily, or being anxious of the uncertain future.

"I understand, I will reflect on that."

"A good answer, and so... let's give some magic to our good kid Shiroe-sama as a present."

"Ah?"

Henrietta turned gracefully on her toes and extended her silk gloves to him.

"Akatsuki-chan? Watch this carefully."

Shiroe touched her fingers as if he had been enchanted, Henrietta took his hand into hers and led him to the middle of the dance floor.

(Wait... Henrietta-san!)

Shiroe thought this was too much.

Even if they needed to dance, they could choose a place with less people and finish in a low-profile manner through one piece of music. Like deep in the corner of the hall, near the southern entrance, there were many places to choose from. The middle of the dance floor should be reserved for the host, main guest, or excellent dancers.

"Shiroe-sama, please smile and push out your chest."

"..."

Shiroe swallowed. He felt just as nervous as he did at the meeting that led up to the formation of the Round Table Council. He experienced similar feelings before a PK battle or a big-scale raid, but this was a unique sense of fear.

The hall was crowded with people who seemed to be observing them and laughing at them. Shiroe was unable to wipe this delusion.

"Listen to me, maintain this posture, put your hand on my waist... no, higher.. yes, just like supporting me from the back."

"I need to confess, I totally don't know how to dance."

"Ah, listening to your confession in this position will make me flustered."

Henrietta smiled at Shiroe with her head raised.

Probably to complement her dress, Henrietta was not wearing her career woman frameless glasses, and her eyes appeared to be bigger. Looking at her smile made Shiroe's face red and heart beat faster.

"That is not what I meant, please don't change the subject!"

"Shiroe-sama? You know what is my profession?"

"Aren't you an accountant...ah!"

Henrietta lowered her gaze to Shiroe's chest, listening carefully to the music and talking softly. She spoke so softly that you almost couldn't hear it, just like the gentle song of birds.

Even though she was listening to this waltz for the first time, Henrietta was able to grasp the beat and then predict the timing.

"Okay Shiroe-sama, shall we dance."

Like the bubbles coming out of a champagne bottle, the hall was filled by the music of the 3rd music piece. Henrietta seemed to be lost in the melodies as she danced with Shiroe.

Shiroe pumped out his chest and supported Henrietta by her waist as Henrietta spoke gently to him, like the flower petals circling in the air and guiding Shiroe.

"Oh right, Henrietta-san is a bard."

Bard.

This was one of the 12 classes in Elder Tales.

This was a weapon-based class, but compared to the high damage potential of assassins and swashbucklers, it was more of a support class in Elder Tales.

Support classes mainly served to increase the battle potential of allies and decrease the power of the enemies in order to gain the advantage in battle. Only Shiroe's enchanter and Henrietta's bard were considered support classes in Elder Tales.

Bard's unique feature was the control of music. As you could see from the name, a bard had abilities based on music, and could learn many status effects that lasted for a long time. Most skills in Elder Tales lasted between an instant and 10 seconds, but bards had many skills that could last for minutes, some were even permanent effects, they were a very unique class.

Henrietta had never taken part in a major raid. Compared to normal battles, players were more stressed and had to fight for a long period of time. You could really see the value of bards in this situation.

Other than this, bards were not as skillful as assassins and swashbucklers in melee combat, they specialized in light weapons like rapiers and bows.

Weapon attacks did not consume MP. So in long battles, using 'attacks that do not consume MP' together with 'MP efficient long effect skills' made their MP to damage efficiency very high, suitable for long term fighting.

On the other hand, this class was designed for long battles, so its attack, heal, and support skills were comparatively low, lacking the ability to break through stalemates with excellent reflexes. When using this class, you needed to plan far ahead and predict how the battle would shift in the future, it was a hard class to master.

Henrietta leaned into Shiroe in the middle of the dance floor and turned repeatedly with grace.

She did not force Shiroe to move his feet, but took the initiative in leading him to move. Shiroe grew accustomed to her actions slowly.

Their alternate world bodies were better than their old ones by tenfold. Even a mage class like Shiroe, compared to his real life body that was addicted to the internet, had an agile and strong body here, just like an athlete.

As Shiroe began to grasp the feeling with his body, she continued to hum quavers to guide him.

"Shiroe-sama, do you understand?"

"Yes, I get the basics."

Henrietta asked softly while humming the quaver.

C is sweet orange.

D is the color of lemon.

E is yellowish green, F is dark blue.

G is the color of the deep ocean, A is the beautiful purple.

B is the red of the evening sky between day and night.

He didn't understand how Henrietta was communicating the musical notes, he also didn't know how she could hum while she was speaking. But the colorful notes appeared from her chest, dancing like fairies around them before disappearing into the air.

This should be the effect of some skill unique to bards, but the notes and music were synchronized so perfectly, that it should be her own talent right? Or was any bard able to do this?

(In simple words...this is like a music game.)

Shiroe was not good at this type of game, but he played it before in the original world. The real world had drums, disc-jockey stations and huge consoles with stepping mechanism for gamers to dance.

Compared to these games, the music beat was slower, the steps were simpler. Shiroe concentrated in synchronizing the music with the colorful notes that were flashing in front of Henrietta's delicate face.

"That's right, right step, right forward step... half a turn."

"Yes teacher."

Shiroe laughed in response, Henrietta looked distracted for a moment, then pouted a little. Even a tiny interaction like this made him feel happy.

(Ah, it's been so long, listening to music is fun, I haven't exercised for quite a while), Shiroe thought.

WebTV, podcasts, MP3, the music that was always around him, because it was so prevalent and free, he forgot how special music was.

Music was very special.

It didn't exist in nature, it was a man-made discovery.

This experience was similar to food, you only knew how good it was after you lost it. Everybody had forgotten about music in this period of time, but bards continued to play their songs, Shiroe was thankful for the beautiful lady in front of him.

"Since you have the found the heart to tease me, can you straighten your back, we are the center of attention in this hall alright? We need to dance as gracefully as feathers... Because Shiroe-sama is our tactician that is darker than black."



But Henrietta did not know how to interpret Shiroe's smile and adopted the attitude of a teacher to warn him.

Shiroe focused on straightening his back, being aware of Henrietta in his arms. He lifted his left hand to avoid unnecessary actions, leading the dance with his fingertips.

Shiroe and Henrietta danced elegantly.

The music sounded clearer than before, his body moved naturally to the melody, his feet and Henrietta moved in sync with the beat of the music up and down the dance floor in beautiful steps.

His heart was at ease, the scene of the hall which was just a background filled his eyes.

The dancers around them moved like flower petals, lost in the music of the performers.

There were countless pairs of eyes on them, the soft conversation of the guests saying 'seems like we can't underestimate these plebeian bumpkins' could be heard clearly.

"So, let's go another round to shut them up?"

"Understood... my lady."

She and Shiroe started to dance to the tune of the new music piece.

CHAPTER.



FOREST RAGRANDA [ラグランダの杜]



► NAME: RUNDELHAUS

► LEVEL: 23

► RACE: HUMAN

► CLASS: SORCERER

► HP: 1321

► MP: 2109

► ITEM 1:

[APPRENTICE MAGICIAN ROBE]

A HIGH QUALITY EQUIPMENT FOR ITS LEVEL, BUT LIMITED TO USERS BELOW LEVEL 30. IT IS AN EXCLUSIVE ACCESSORY FOR BEGINNERS, GIVING THE IMPRESSION THAT ONE IS NOT YET INDEPENDENT. RUNDELHAUS WISH TO UPGRADE THIS EQUIPMENT SOON.



► ITEM 2:

[FEATHER RING]

BESTOW MAGIC OF FEATHER WEIGHT, REDUCING THE WEIGHT OF ITEMS YOU ARE CARRYING AND INCREASING THE AMOUNT YOU CAN CARRY. OTHER ACCESSORIES IS MORE EFFECTIVE IN INCREASING ARM STRENGTH AND CARRYING CAPACITY, RESULTING IN THIS ITEM BEING SOLD CHEAPLY IN THE MARKET, IT IS VERY AFFORDABLE FOR BEGINNERS.



► ITEM 3:

[ANGEL BRUSH]

A MAGICAL BRUSH THAT MAKES ANY HAIR OR FUR SHINY AND SMOOTH, MAINLY USED TO INCREASE TRUST AND AFFECTION LEVELS OF MOUNTS AND PETS, BUT RUNDELHAUS HAS NO CLUE AND LOVES TO USE IT.



<table width=60%><tr><td width=25%; valign="top">Name: Rundelhous

Level: 23

Race: Human

Class: Sorcerer

HP: 1321

MP: 2109<td>Equipment

Apprentice magician robe
 A high quality equipment for its level, but limited to users below level 30. It is an exclusive accessory for beginners. Giving the impression that one is not yet independent, Rundelhous wishes to upgrade this equipment soon.

Feather Ring
 Bestows magic of feather weight, reducing the weight of items you are carrying and increasing the amount you can carry. Other accessories are more effective in increasing arm strength and carrying capacity, resulting in this item being sold cheaply in the market, it is very affordable for beginners.

Angel Brush
 A magical brush that makes any hair or fur shiny and smooth, mainly used to increase trust and affection levels of mounts and pets, but Rundelhous has no clue and loves to use it.

Chapter 2: Forest Ragranda

Part 1

"Ragranda Forest?" Tohya asked. "Seems to be the name of a dungeon."

Naotsugu replied immediately: "It is not 'it seems like a dungeon', it is a dungeon."

The sky that was light purple had turned deep blue, the school that sheltered them was illuminated by several campfires on the field.

Tonight they were celebrating with a BBQ party for reaching the campsite.

The 60-odd participants gathered in the school yard to enjoy their dinner.

It was summertime in August.

The sweltering heat from the sun in the day was still trapped in the ground and was dissipating slowly. But the dry wind in the night felt comfortable to the skin. It was bearable even if you sweat.

And the food was top class.

Nyanta's dishes were always delicious, eating it together with the big group also had a nice feeling. Tohya had always liked this type of atmosphere, he remembered visiting the temple fair and eating the snacks from the street shops. He recalled his sister Minori throwing a tantrum as well.

Minori was busy handing out beverages to everyone, but she came over when she saw Tohya waving at her, asking him what was the matter.

"Minori, that is, I heard we will be going to a dungeon. You know that?"

"Ah? Dungeon?"

Minori was just as surprised as Tohya was.

The training camp was going to last for 3 weeks, they expected to have live battle training, but never thought that they would be raiding a dungeon.

"I'm going too?"

Naotsugu nodded at Minori's question.

"I know this is a bit too heavy a burden on Minori, but rather than assigning you to a different group, wouldn't you feel better if you party together with Tohya, in case anything happens?"

"Of course."

Tohya nodded repeatedly. He and Minori were twins.

Even though Minori was the elder sister by time of birth, Tohya didn't see his sister as a guardian, but felt strongly that 'I am a boy, sister is a girl'. In that case, even if he was not on the level of being Minori's guardian, Tohya still thought he should protect his sister.

They had been partners since coming to this world, so it would be better if they partied together. And if his sister fell into any danger when they were apart, and he was not there for her... Tohya was unable to imagine that.

"You are right."

It seemed like the sister felt the same way, and nodded in agreement.

"We can assign Minori-cci to the beach group, but for the sake of the future, it will be good to experience raiding a dungeon nya."

Chief Nyanta approached with a rectangular tray filled with grilled Japanese horse mackerel as he spoke.

"What do you mean by the beach group?"

Chief Nyanta explained in detail.

The beginners varied in levels.

The policy of this summer training camp was to use the school as a campsite, and to conduct training courses with different groups based on their abilities.

For very low levels... players less than level 20, they would be farming wildlife around the campus, or battling Ascot Crabs at the beach. There were healers and camp leaders with the group, so it was very safe in accumulating EXP.

But the battles would be 1-on-1, so they wouldn't be forming parties. The beginners needed to understand the skills of their class, what they could

do, and what they excelled in. They wouldn't be able to work well with others until they grasped their own abilities, so this stage would be solo training.

Actually, the campers including Minori had already 'trained' at the beach during the day, when they were dragged there by Maryele. But in the end they changed into their swimsuits and played at the beach all day, Minori had already done some reflection on this.

They left the setting up of the camp and moving of goods to the men, and just enjoyed this vacation activity in the confusion.

She even played beach volleyball with the girls she knew from Crescent Moon Alliance and Maryele who cheered loudly "Wah, this is so much fun! I am so happy! Summer should be like this right? It has to be swimsuits right? This is great!" Maryele was a scary influence on the others.

Her bombshell body was also scary, which made Minori embarrassed about her childish swimsuit. But even if she tried to dress maturely, it would still make her embarrassed.

Adventurers of levels 20-35 would be forming teams for battle practices, which would be conducted either indoors or outside. Outdoor training would be conducted at the 'Caminash Waterway'.

Indoor training would be in the Ragranda Forest that Tohya just heard of. The dungeon was situated in the direction of the forested area of the peninsula, about a half-day journey. The raid would take several days to complete, so it was the toughest training in a sense.

There were only a handful of players above level 36, so they were doing individual training with the high-level camp leaders as mentors on campus. The goal was to get everyone to reach level 40.

Tohya was level 29, and worked as a tank during his time in Hamelin's farming group, so he was quite good in battles.

The underground ruins known as Ragranda Forest, with enemies of various levels, were suitable for players between level 20 to 35 to challenge. It should be tough for Tohya who was right in the midpoint at level 29.

Tohya's heart burned with passion when he thought about this.

On the other hand, his big sister Minori was level 21, her subclass tailor was level 32, much higher than Tohya's subclass. But her subclass was useless in battles. Minori's level put her at a disadvantage and Tohya was determined to protect her.

"There will be further briefings before we start the training nya. Level 29 and 21 will not affect the team balance too much, use the innate understanding between twins to make up for it in battle and you will be fine nya."

Chief Nyanta squeezed some tangerine juice onto the grilled Japanese horse mackerel before digging in, he was probably done with cooking for the day. He poured some wine into a bowl, and drank to his heart's content.

"So that's it, dungeons... my fighting spirit is burning!"

Tohya was unable to hold back his anticipation.

When Tohya was with Hamelin, he had fought with monsters to farm before, but because of the distance and their team power balance, he had never been to a dungeon before.

In Elder Tales, dungeons were not the term for an underground prison. It was also used for ruins, castles, forts, towers, shrines, caves, and many others.

It meant 'An enclosed place where you could fight monsters'.

Dungeons were usually ruins or remnants of a magical culture from ancient times or a naturally formed cavern. These ruins were separated into zones which were nests of wild creatures, and it was easy to see the path to the next area. It provided a lot of benefits to the defending side, and had a high 'requirement' in order to complete it.

The 'requirement' here was from the monster's perspective.

Disregarding the intentions of the builders and original occupiers, most dungeons ended up becoming a dwelling for monsters. Demihumans who possessed some intelligence like 'Orcs', 'Goblins' and 'Ratmen' set up forts to used as a base. Beasts like 'Owlbears' and 'Chimera' simply wanted to use the area as a nest, like bears in a cave.

Everyone also knew that high level undead and dragons were some of the few high-class types with high intelligence, and they would use challenging dungeons to hide their treasures.

Tohya had never formally fought in dungeons before, but he had joined Log Horizon for 2 months. During his time in the guild house, he was already good friends with Naotsugu and Nyanta. They would talk about their vast battle experience in Elder Tales, so he had accumulated a lot of knowledge on dungeons.

(Naotsugu-san said the difficulty of dungeon battles were incomparable to battles in the wild!)

Tohya was eager to try.

Naotsugu was Tohya's teacher right now.

Shiroe was Tohya's benefactor and instructor, but in terms of melee techniques and tanking skills he couldn't compare to Naotsugu. Even so, Shiroe definitely possessed enough knowledge and could give Tohya various tips.

But Log Horizon had an excellent vanguard in Naotsugu, his experience in Elder Tales was comparable to Shiroe, his battle experience was also among the top in the whole server. As advised by Shiroe, Tohya started learning from his fellow warrior class guild member Naotsugu.

Tohya also liked Naotsugu, almost as much as he liked Shiroe.

Naotsugu was friendly, and you wouldn't feel any age gap with him. He was a reliable good guy, Tohya thought all men should be strong like him.

Tohya who had been instructed by Naotsugu was confident in challenging any battles.

(...I will be challenging dungeons sooner or later, this is just a step on my path to becoming an independent Adventurer.)

Saying he had no ambition was a lie.

"Alright, Minori! Let's go! Tomorrow we will be challenging Ragranda Forest!"

"I can't stand this, Tohya... I will definitely catch up to your level!"

Minori seemed determined as well, as she looked at Tohya confidently.

They bumped their fists, a greeting they had since they were young.

Under the night sky of the Sand Leaf zone and the crackling sound of the campfire in the school campus, the beginners were filled with anticipation and determination for the training that started tomorrow.

Part 2

The next morning, Minori's group headed towards the central hilly region of Sand Leaf peninsula.

There were no treacherous mountains in the peninsula. On the contrary, it was filled with hills of varying sizes, some as small as a pond, others as big as a lake. There was water flowing everywhere, the clear streams converging into the Sand Leaf River, or directly into the sea.

Compared to the old world, it was less than a hundred km away from Tokyo, but in Elder Tales, the atmosphere was like a kingdom of nature.

On their way here they had seen orioles, white face sparrows, pied kingfishers, birds that you could see in the old world. They also saw some deer. In the Japanese server zones, wildlife like this could be seen everywhere.

The trees were also reproducing virally, even though there were no mysterious ancient trees found in Akiba here, there were many of them with trunks that Tohya and Minori couldn't hug even if they worked together. And there were thousands of them, all pointing straight up into the sky. Everyone was moved by this scenery.

The twins grew up in Tokyo.

They had never been so impressed and stunned by the power of nature.

Minori was speechless, while Tohya kept repeating the word "Amazing!"

(The vocabulary of my brother is so limited, I feel embarrassed as his sister.)

This was part of Minori's true feelings, but the other part of her was happy to see her brother's pure display of surprise and joy.

After hiking along the hill for quite some time, the group reached a plaza which was made by clearing away the trees. Sweeping away the decaying leaves with their feet, they could see stone slates covering the ground. There was a Torii with its color faded after many years of exposure to the elements.

This seemed to be a shrine around here.

The 14 people in the group dismounted and gathered in the plaza, they had been traveling from the school since dawn, and it was already noon when they arrived.

Even though they rested a few times on their way here, Minori didn't expect they would need so much time to travel in the hills.

In the center of the group was Naotsugu, Nyanta, and a cleric sent from the Black Sword Knights, Rezarick.

Nyanta pointed at a large cavern entrance that everyone could see.

"That is Ragranda Forest nya, but the inside is very spacious... To put it simply, if you take the right at the first T junction, the route will be easier. Going left will lead to a more challenging area nya."

The beginners looked at the giant cave entrance and gulped.

Even without Nyanta pointing it out, once they reached the plaza, their gazes were all focused at the entrance that was like a house made of boulders.

Vines entangled the edge of the entrance, there were old and crumbling straw ropes used to exorcise spirits hanging at the entrance, but there were no holy feelings here at all. There was only a rotting smell, and the air could only be described as miasma.

"Ah, there might be small demon beasts inside, but the rest should be undead type."

Naotsugu warned the campers.

Undead type.

They were not fully dead for various reasons, or they still lingered in this world because of evil reasons like curses. Moving using the power from spirits, the undead type monsters.

The most common monsters of that type would be skeletons and zombies, but also included monsters that had no physical bodies like banshees.

"This is a camp to train up your battle powers nya, 'knowing your own limits' is also a part of your battle power nya, you have to consider your retreat route at all times, and practice your judgment on when to come out nya."

"That's right, you must treasure your life."

Nyanta and Naotsugu reminded them.

"I will be setting up camp here with Naotsugu-san and Nyanta-san and wait for your return. We will be camping at this plaza, and will challenge the dungeon every day. You don't need to clear it in one day. You can recover your strength once you return to camp, you can relax here."

Rezarick looked strict, but he seems to be a caring person. His words assured the campers.

"Eh, teacher is not coming?"

Tohya shouted, Naotsugu nodded with a smile.

"Of course, this is a training for beginners. If experienced players tag along, that won't be training right? You are a vanguard as well, so you should understand that right? If I am the tank, you won't be able to learn anything."

When he put it that way, it made sense. But Minori was still worried.

Minori trusted Tohya, she even heard that he was an excellent tank (for beginners). What she was worried about was her healing abilities.

With Tohya holding down a key position, if he did not have the support of healers, he wouldn't be able to endure the attacks for long.

But since their instructors Naotsugu and Nyanta said so, Minori had no objections. They assigned them the task because they believed in their abilities, so the twins should respond by living up to their expectations.

The other beginners also had worried expressions, but all of them nodded their heads with similar thoughts to Minori.

Next was party assignment.

The dungeon had two halves, and the beginners were separated according to their strengths as well. The twins were in the weaker team, as the group split into two as the cleric read out their names.

The weaker party had 5 people.

The maximum number in a party was 6, so this was not an optimal situation. But since there were 11 beginners, this could not be helped.

The crucial vanguard position with the duty of attracting and intercepting the enemies' attacks was filled by Tohya, Minori's twin brother. He was a samurai, level 29.

In the central position was Isuzu, a slender and tall bard. She had been friends with Minori since their time in Hamelin, and was now in Crescent Moon Alliance. She was a bubbly girl with freckles, wielding a 2-handed spear that was rare for a bard. She was 3 years older than Minori, a high school girl in the real world, level 24.

There were 3 people in the rear guard.

First was a young sorcerer, Rundelhous. He wore a flashy robe, and was very prominent with his snobbish behavior, a solo player not in any guild, level 23.

Next was the druid Serara. When Minori escaped from Hamelin, Serara took care of her. They found out their levels were close after talking, and they became friends.

Serara was also in high school, so her age was closer to Isuzu. She seemed to have a crush on Nyanta, always sticking close to him on the ride here, level 25.

Minori herself was a Kannagi in the healer class, level 21, the weakest in the party. Shiroe taught them 'battle has nothing to do with levels', but it still made Minori uneasy.

The only redeeming point was that Serara the druid was in the same party, if Minori's healing was not enough, Serara could pitch in as well.

(Chief Nyanta must have considered this when assigning the parties.)

"Well then, let's begin the 15 minutes strategy session."

Nyanta said "Begin!" and clapped his hands, ending his instruction for the group.

Minori's party gathered in confusion.

If they looked to the other side, the party that was 5 levels higher than them on average was also having a discussion in a circle.

"Eh...What should we talk about?"

Tohya asks the group.

"Even if you say that..."

Isuzu looked at the rest with a frown.

"Hmmm, so that is to say, everyone, let's do our best right?"

Rundelhous said confidently holding his 2-handed staff. This youth had blond hair and green eyes, similar to a prince in fairy tales. In Minori's eyes, his 'rich young master' aura was a bit too strong.

"That is...."

"Correct! You are right! Next will be the battlefield, it's a dungeon right? Dungeon! Fighting spirit is the most important!"

Tohya cut off Minori's words and shook both of Rundelhous' hands strongly.

"That's right! You understand! Spirit is the most important, even though being elegant and graceful is important, but the essence of a man is spirit and passion!"

Rundelhous seemed very happy to have Tohya's support, and they became fast friends out of the blue.

(But, I think we should discuss something like formation and patrol file...)

"That's it, let's work hard together! We are comrades that will be grinding in the dungeon for a whole week after all!"

Isuzu had a smile over her freckled face.

(I can't say it in this atmosphere...)

Minori peeked to her side, Serara also had a troubled expression. She smiled to reassure her, and she smiled in return, which put Minori at ease.

As Minori's party continued to interact, the stronger party started to move into Ragranda Forest. Minori noticed this when Nyanta shouted: "Work hard in your battles nya!"

Minori clenched her fists hard.

After leaving Hamelin for 2 months, Minori was not completely useless. Hamelin forced her to take up the subclass tailor, which she was unfamiliar with. She abandoned her subclass training and worked on leveling up together with Tohya under the guidance of Shiroe's group.

After much hard work, Minori rose from level 12 to 21, but Shiroe warned them about the cons of only grinding levels, so the overall training was progressing slowly.

All their battles so far had been under the supervision of a high-level guild member.

But even though they set up a camp outside to support them, they had to party by themselves to explore the dungeon and defeat their enemies, so it was normal for them to feel nervous.

Minori was not afraid of losing.

She was afraid of doing some embarrassing actions in front of the group.

When she thought she might waste all the teaching and efforts put in by Shiroe's group, her knees would be like jelly, unable to walk properly.

"Minori-cchi, are you okay nya?"

Someone spoke to her suddenly, making Minori lift her head in shock. Nyanta was in front of her with his usual slit eyes and a kind face. This face with a hint of doubt, made Minori shake her head and say "It's nothing!"

Naotsugu looked at this scene and commented "Minori is such a worrywart" and laughed softly.

"Listen, if you encounter any trouble, remember to move forward. Not your legs, but your hearts, can you promise me that?"

Naotsugu patted Minori's head, approached the other party members and spoke to them.

Minori looked at his back.

Naotsugu and Nyanta were encouraging and instructing her teammates, Serara seemed so grateful that she might tackle him in a hug. Rundelhous' arrogance was obvious, Tohya promised to bring back a souvenir, Isuzu bowed in gratitude.

"Alright, you are lagging a bit too much from the other team, time to go! Work hard!"

And so, Minori's party challenged a dungeon for the first time.

Part 3

The morning after the banquet, Shiroe's group enjoyed their breakfast on a roomy terrace.

The terrace the ambassador team gathered in had all sorts of plants, the crystal atrium reflected the bright summer sun.

This terrace was about the size of a small-scale greenhouse, with 3 dining tables, a very luxurious place.

The dishes were very traditional, freshly baked bread, sunny-side-up eggs, cheese, ham, jam, honey, and butter. There were also fruits and vegetable salad platters and various beverages, everything was decorated elegantly.

Shiroe just needed raw eggs with rice for breakfast, but there was nothing to complain about for this breakfast. According to production guildmaster Michitaka, this was "hmmm... quite normal".

Akiba's standard for food had been progressing rapidly for the past 2 months. There were even beef bowls available now through unknown methods, surprising Shiroe.

Processed seasonings like soy sauce and miso soup had also debuted in the form of 'imitation versions.' The news was that fermentation and

processing time could take up to years for it to have proper taste, the 'imitation version' skipped several processes and was an inferior product. But to the people who had grown accustomed to the tasteless food of days past, this was a joyful taste.

"Eh, my lord, pass me the jam please."

Akatsuki asked Shiroe while holding a piece of bread with her petite mouth. Her sense of 'shinobi loyalty' seemed to differ from the common world. Apart from addressing Shiroe as lord, the two of them had a normal relationship.

"Akatsuki-chan, you need to eat the salad too, or your skin will turn bad."

Henrietta was looking for ways to interact with Akatsuki, but Akatsuki lifted herself off the chair, getting ready to escape.

"Such a comfortable morning!"

Just as Michitaka said, the blue of the morning sky was spectacularly beautiful.

Enclosed by a glass wall, there was no wind in the terrace, but it was cool here with several waterways in the area. There was no heat from the summer here, only the bright sunlight.

"That's right."

'Berserker' Krusty was calmly sipping his tea. The other members also helped themselves to breakfast. When they first arrived at the terrace, the tables were much further apart, and there was an obvious difference in quality for each table.

This should be the difference in treatment for nobles and servants.

But the group was not bothered by this, they pulled the tables closer and passed the breadbasket around freely, picking the ones they preferred. If there was not enough they could just take more from their bags, there were already people who were drinking their own green and thick beverages.

"But this is luxurious, I did expect them to arrange our accommodations, but not this level of service."

Henrietta stopped when she reached this point of her speech.

After the banquet ended, the group was led to their living abodes, but instead of rooms, it should be described as zones.

Situated on the southeast corner of the palace of this floor, there were twenty rooms. There was also a small meeting room, the terrace they were in, showers, a recreation room, a chatting room, and several rooms for receiving guests.

"But if this is the case... hmmm."

"What is the matter, Shiroe-dono?"

Michitaka inquired.

"Michitaka-san, do we have a chef here?"

"Of course, what's the issue?"

"I think we should get more chefs and people to supply food, the supporting staff need to be capable, between 3-6 people."

"Indeed."

Krusty nodded at Shiroe's request.

"What is the problem? They won't poison us right?"

Shiroe calmed Michitaka down.

"No, the reason why they arranged such a big place for us... is in anticipation that we would need to entertain guests as well. I have always felt that 10 days is too long, but I understand now. The meetings will be held in several sessions, but there will be many side meetings and invitations to talk, these are known as tea parties."

"That should be what is happening. I was invited to many tea parties the night of the banquet."

"Now you mention it, so was I."

"But I changed the topic tactfully."

Krusty concluded with a cold expression. But in this situation, they would be receiving a lot more tea party invitations, and would be forced to attend some, so Shiroe thought it was best to be prepared.

"I wonder what today's meeting schedule will be like... Hey, Kaayu."

"Here boss."

Michitaka called for his aide from his guild, instructing the youth Kaayu to find out today's meeting schedule, and also reminded him to collect intelligence.

After Kaayu left energetically, Shiroe, Michitaka and Krusty continued to drink their tea. There were only the 3 of them at this table, but the other table was within earshot, so they could discuss things together.

"...seems like this is more complicated than expected."

Krusty and Shiroe nodded to acknowledge Michitaka's point.

'League of Freedom Towns Eastal' was formed by 24 noble families, 25 if you included the Round Table Council. They were spread all across east Japan, governing their own territories. The ones that were larger in scale had a citadel city at most, supported by surrounding farms and a few villages.

Duke Sergead's Maihama was the largest among the nobles, but only had a population of 30,000 at most.

Of the 3 ladies who debuted last night, one was Marquis Lestar's daughter from Owly, another was the granddaughter of Freedom City Iwafune's Lord Sugana. But these two cities had a population of around 10,000, considered mid-size among the nobles.

If you thought about this you would understand Akiba with 15,000 Adventurers and total population of 20,000, was a force to reckon with. Ignoring the fact of the individual battle prowess of Adventurers, the scale of the city itself ranked among the top 5 in the 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal'.

Other than this, there were countless small-scale villages in the east Japan region which were not under the control or protection of any nobles.

These independent villages did not revolt against the lords. In this world where monsters roamed freely, they yearned to be part of the nobles' territories to be protected. But the nobles would decline with the reason 'it is too far from the main city' and not send any soldiers to guard them.

The duty of nobles was to ensure the safety of their citizens and territory. If you viewed it from an extreme point, taxes were the price they paid for protection.

There were also criminals within their territories, and there were also incidents of monster attacks. But these incidents were different from 'being unable to organize defensive forces'.

If it was in a distance that could be covered in a day of riding, the nobles would be able to send troops to protect these villages. But any further they would need to station an army camp there.

In this fantasy world, traveling took more time than you could imagine, increasing the mobility of a small group of soldiers in order to expand their protection range was impossible to execute.

There were also many farmers who were independent and preferred to not deal with nobles. If the noble was able to increase their armed forces cheaply, there would be a possibility of an increase in taxes.

(Just gaining intelligence on this is worth our time here.)

The nobles also knew about the existence of Adventurers.

Since the time when Elder Tales was just a game, there were many quests involving the protection of villages, escorting travelers, and defeating groups of monsters because of the nobles.

Similar to hiring mercenaries, they could put up job requests for Adventurers that normal soldiers didn't have the time to handle, or even outsource the soldiers' jobs to them to free up resources for their soldiers to fight elsewhere.

The pioneer villages not under the nobles' jurisdictions would also send requests to Adventurers when they were attacked by monsters or demihumans.

After the Catastrophe, many players including Shiroe spent the majority of their time trying to grasp the situation and to survive. They also trained to learn how to use their skills here. These pioneer villages definitely needed the aid of Adventurers more. With Akiba taking the lead, Adventurers everywhere were also having a revolution in technology, the nobles knew about this as well.

"Seems like they want to recruit us, I can understand their feelings."

Michitaka added honey to his tea as he speaks.

"Now I understand Shiroe-kun's speech... to build relations with the People of the Land, right? We need to handle this part delicately, so Akiba won't be fazed by the situation. I wonder what kind of divisive schemes they have up their sleeves."

"It is too early to let down our guard, it is highly possible they are just starting their divisive plots."

Shiroe replied in a low voice.

Even if it was a bit delusional, his keen observations had already considered several negative ways this could play out.

"The topic of division can be dealt with later, the important thing in the current phase is to understand their methods and operation philosophy, we need to start from there."

"That's right... What are your views, Shiroe-kun?"

Shiroe summarized the situation he understood from their conversations last night.

"I think the intent of the nobles is quite obvious. They wanted to understand the ambition of the Round Table Council at the beginning, and to observe how barbaric we are. But we have cleared most of their worries in last night's banquet, seeing us as intelligent and reasonable enough to communicate with. Their next step is recruitment, they were planning to bestow a title of nobility on Krusty-san, there are no cons in doing that. If they have a cat, they need to tie a bell on its neck, the nobles are still moving in consensus up 'til this point. There are some who object to this, but they will settle such disputes afterwards, prioritizing on the recruitment plan."

When Shiroe reached this point of his speech, the crystal door at the entrance of the terrace opened, Kaayu of Oceanic Systems was back. He was successful in obtaining information, and with the permission of Michitaka, he gave his report.

"The official news will be made in the afternoon, but the nobles' meeting appears to have been cancelled."

Krusty nodded curtly, Michitaka signaled Kaayu to continue.

"I asked the other employees... This palace is managed by them all year long....This seems to be the usual practice of the annual noble meetings. After starting with a banquet, there will be lunch sessions, tea parties, night parties, and dinner gatherings, so the nobles bring along many attendants. Our numbers and luggage are small by comparison, that's why we have so many empty rooms. There will be nobles meeting in the last few days where they will raise agendas they have arranged beforehand, which will be decided by a majority vote speedily."

Shiroe nodded in agreement.

Thinking about it carefully, even if there were 24 members, their power and scale differed widely. Compared to holding a series of meetings to vote and discuss any dissenting opinions, dealing with each other privately and forming alliances and compromise was a smoother way of communication. In Japan this was known as 'consultation', it was not a special idea.

"Alright, the schedule for the next few days is obvious, Akiba has powerful military capabilities, the nobles understand this as well. All who challenge us 1-on-1 will be seeking their own destruction, so they will be careful in contacting us. But if they are successful in getting on good terms with the Round Table Council, it will have many advantages for them in this world. As mentioned by Krusty-san and Michitaka-san, their invitations for meetings will increase. Requests for Akiba's battle prowess, finance, talents, inventions, and tools will be overwhelming. We need to clear this problematic barrier in this phase of negotiations."

"So we need to set a basic policy for future talks... Hmm..."

Shiroe's analysis made Michitaka frown, this was a troublesome issue indeed.

"From the perspective of the Round Table Council, we will be fine declining all invitations. But both battle guilds and production guilds might want to accept some of their requests. Other than guilds, we need to consider if individual players want to accept these requests too. We shouldn't handle all the details involved. For instance, even if we restrict exporting goods from Akiba to other cities, we won't be able to lock down the market anyway. The same goes for battle guilds. If the request is for 5000 mercenaries, that will be too much for us, and we can decline them. But if

they just want to hire a few Adventurers, even if we restrict it, it will be useless if the players are okay with it."

"This part should be correct."

Krusty nodded in reply.

The governing system in Akiba had been set up after much effort. After 2 months of practice, a lot of Adventurers had gotten used to fighting in the alternate world, a support system with food as its core had also been built over time.

The next craze would be world exploration, the plan to investigate the fairy rings should be underway. With this, there would be more chances for each guild to receive requests, which should ensure their freedom in this aspect.

"Regarding the outflow of our resources, if the scale is too big, we might have to consider export taxes...Henrietta-san, what are your views regarding this?"

"....Hmmm, my expertise is not in finance, so I cannot say for certain...I am just a normal accountant anyway. But from the current phase, I think Akiba is not a first class production city, and we are unable to acquire farm stocks and fisheries in bulk. Regarding the problems associated with resource outflow, importation is not the problem, there will be problems if we stop importation... As for exports, considering the transport ability of this world, we should be concerned about items that are small in number but have large impacts. There is a more serious problem, that is the loss of technology and talents associated with them."

Henrietta adjusted her glasses as she spoke.

Shiroe considered her words momentarily and continued.

"Yes, this is also a pressing matter... After this diplomatic visit is over, the Round Table Council will need to discuss this. But I don't think we can stonewall the nobles about everything, so we should announce that the Round Table Council has set up a department of foreign affairs, in charge of battle assignments, provision of skills and exports. Nobles will just need to submit an official request to the department, we will reply after discussion. I think this process will be more suitable. After this visit, we will really need to set up this department, but if it is jobs that are more common

in nature, we can set up an administration system. For example, we receive a request to "defeat 100 goblins in the hills." This job will be assigned to a battle guild registered with the foreign affairs department. It is the same for the corporate side, if there is an order for "200 sets of cutlery," it can be handled by the department and delegated to a guild. If the request is beyond the capacity of a small guild, it will be escalated to the Round Table Council to handle. How does everyone feel about this?"

Shiroe's concept was based on using the department of foreign affairs to handle quest systems just like the old days.

"This proposal is fine."

"I think this very adequate, this part should be fine for the 3 of us to decide. We can use telepathy to report to the others later."

Michitaka and Krusty nodded in agreement.

"But I think the nobles won't be satisfied with this. If they cannot convince the Round Table Council as a group, they would want to get closer to the representatives of Oceanic Systems or D.D.D. The nobles are planning to form secret pacts during this period, and for us... we can only deal with them on the spot, be careful not to let them grab your weak spots."

Shiroe concluded.

Shiroe was unable to come up with a strategy on the whole. They would need to make judgement calls on the spot. Even if he could come up with a policy, he was unable to oversee the individual battles.

"This part will be our responsibility."

Krusty nodded slowly. As expected of the guild master of a large guild, his calm and confident demeanor gave off the aura of a natural-born leader.

"Avoid making contracts carelessly, and try to get intelligence from them, correct?"

"Yes, we should move along this line."

Henrietta agreed with Michitaka's words.

The other members also joined in the debate, setting up counter strategies for some common scenarios. They were also expecting bribery and secret

dealings. After confirming that they should deal in secret as much as possible, they concluded the breakfast session.

Part 4

Raynesia's mood was akin to low altitude flying.

Low altitude flying was the proper term, but her heart had in fact fallen down a cliff. The reason why she didn't use the term fell down a cliff was because she was the eastern region's most powerful noble's, Sergead's, granddaughter.

Simply put, her position did not allow her to sulk in her room.

'Sulk to the bottom of a cliff' sounded so gloomy that she couldn't move, but her handmaid followed her like a shadow, with no regards to her wants, she was forced to change her clothes every morning and attend various events.

If you considered this, instead of being depressed to a fixed position like the bottom of the cliff, her feelings were still moving like low altitude flying. But her heart felt she was being dragged all around the place.

"Qoo..."

She sighed softly.

This was one of the many empty gardens in the 'Ancient Palace of Eternal Ice', the time was shortly after noon. She forced her maid to let her be alone here for a while.

There were no tea parties for the afternoon, but there was a dinner gathering after sunset. She needed to play host along with grandfather Duke Sergead, father Fernile and mother Sarariya, to several nobles and entertain them. It was not difficult and didn't take much effort, but it made her heart feel heavy.

She leaned lazily on the table, her forehead touching the cool marble.

Nothing in particular happened that made her sad.

This was just her nature, cowardly, afraid of troubles, always frowning and thinking about useless things, pessimistic and had no energy, this was how she saw herself.

If there was no one to bother her, she would just hide in a corner peacefully, that was how she was. Instead of saying she was gloomy, a better description was she critically lacked a cheerful side. Even though it was wrong to say this about yourself, she felt that others wouldn't want to socialize with someone like her.

Speaking of Raynesia's appearance, she had long silver hair and a slender neck, a frail and skinny beautiful young lady. The corners of her greyish green eyes drooped down slightly, seeming to give a hint of mysterious sadness. Her breast and body were not well developed, but it was enough to see her as a girl. If there were men who preferred a body type like hers, they would definitely see her as a beauty.

(Ah.)

Even so, she looked very sloppy the way she lay over the table.

Others would praise her beauty, and she was aware of it too.

But she felt that 50% of it was because of her grandfather Duke Sergead, 40% was because she showered every day and took care of her hair and put on makeup, anybody could be like her... In other words, her beauty stemmed from the power of the nobles, making her feel a sense of guilt.

10% she attributed to her feeling 'maybe I am pretty cute after all'. But if she heard others describe her as 'What a dreamy princess' or 'cultured lady with a sense of sorrow', she would snap out of it and face reality.

(Not full of sorrow, I'm just gloomy. Not a cultured lady, I'm just not energetic... that is all...)

As she thought like this, she gave in to her masochistic feelings and lay down on the table. She spent every day thinking about these kind of things, seeing herself as a complicated and troublesome person. But it couldn't be helped if she didn't change her nature.

"An army is lucky to have a commander like you, the capabilities can rival those of the 'Knights of the East'."

"...No, our forces are not that powerful, we still have many issues with battle readiness to fine-tune."

The approaching steps and conversation seemed to be coming from nobles.

A middle-aged man sounded a bit panicky, the other young man seemed stable and calm.

Raynesia sat up straight in an instant when she heard the sound.

In this palace filled with schemes and treachery, women of clan Corwen could not display weakness. Raynesia was a grumpy girl with no energy, but she was still willing to protect her family's pride.

"Please visit my territory if you have the time, I have fine wine at my place. It is almost night, want to have a drink together?"

"Hmm, drinking... I am very sorry."

Several people appeared in the corner of the rose garden and walked in this direction.

The two men in front, the left was the lord of Tsukuba Marquis Kyriva. Tsukuba has an influential university and he was respected for his efforts in governing his lands. Behind him seemed to be the Marquis' attendants and maids.

On the other hand, the young man who was walking beside the Marquis... No, he didn't look like a knight.

His tidy short hair and spectacles made him look intelligent. His strong body and crisp movements were a sign of a man of action in the battlefield. Simply strolling was enough to feel an air of intimidation about him, he had the demeanor of a young general.

(That is... the one I saw yesterday...)

Raynesia saw a flash of memory.

She remembered her father saying that he was one of the Adventurers, but they were not introduced. She recalled her grandfather chatted with him for a long time. Father described him as "For good or bad, they will be the eye of the storm of 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal'."

The people passing by were quite a distance from Raynesia.

Raynesia hoped that they would see her as 'a princess enjoying tea in a pavilion inside the garden'. This made Raynesia relax, she just needed to nod her head and greet them to avoid any trouble.

But maybe it was a coincidence, her eyes met with the young man who looked like a knight. Raynesia instinctively nodded to greet him, showing a face that the young knights in the city described as 'a smile akin to a flower in the rain'. This was a popular face, and could be used on many occasions, a tool that Raynesia utilized frequently.

The young knight stopped in his tracks and smiled... Or appeared to. The reflection of the sun from his spectacles made it hard to see his face.

"Marquis Kyriva, I apologize, but I have a prior engagement."

"And who might you be meeting... Eh, it is Princess Raynesia!"

This man walked towards Raynesia slowly. Raynesia was troubled, or rather, her face was cramping up.

The knight approached steadily and with no signs of hesitation, which convinced Marquis Kyriva it was true. His gaze switched between the knight and Princess Raynesia several times and said: "I shouldn't be so obtuse. Krusty-dono, let's improve our friendship some other time."

The knight known as Krusty turned at the entrance of the pavilion to bid Marquis Kyriva farewell. After the Marquis was gone from sight, he entered the pavilion with Raynesia confused and frozen in place.

(Wah, he... he is tall...)

He should be taller than 190cm. Raynesia had seen burly knights in the city before, but this young knight was big not gentle, his face had a hint of sensibility, giving off an elegant feeling.

"I... I am from Maihama, a daughter of clan Corwen, my name is Raynesia. May I ask, your prior engagement... is with who?"

"Ah, I am Krusty, an Adventurer."

After he said that, he took a seat diagonally across from Raynesia.

There were several fixed marble benches in the pavilion. They were covered in leather or had feather cushions on top. The marble table was made shorter than usual, a classy design suitable for drinking tea elegantly.

"The prior engagement I mentioned was just an excuse, if I made you feel troubled, I apologize..."

The young knight said without any guilt.

(That means... he is using me? But he doesn't look like a bad guy....)

Raynesia was unable to guess Krusty's intent, but if her father was right, this man was the eye of the storm for the 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal'. She had to be polite and nice to him. Raynesia waited for Krusty to continue like an elegant noble lady should.

"You are thinking 'I am so tired', correct?"

"Hm!"

Krusty's comment made Raynesia freeze.

"Not only that, when our eyes first met, you were thinking "this is going to be trouble", right?"

"Eh!"

Raynesia was totally frozen now, while Krusty smiled. His smile was sensible and gentle, but to Raynesia, it looked like a devil's smile.

"Why...Why..."

"Why do I know? It's instinct, my kid sister back in town has the same attitude as you, so I can tell."

He said this with no signs of mischief, just stating the facts like the result of an experiment.

(...This, this, this, this man is a bad man!)

"It's not like that, oh hohoho..."

Raynesia maintained her elegant lady's smile, but her action was stiff like an un-oiled machine.

"I won't eat you, there is no need to be nervous."

"Even if you say so, that is..."

"I have been chased around by the lords and nobles all morning, but since you are Duke Sergead's granddaughter, they will be hesitant to interrupt us. Is it convenient to chat with me?"

The truth was Raynesia was unwilling to.

Not only was this troublesome, it was also scary in a way.

This gentle young man was able to see through her, even seemed to be able to read her mind. Raynesia felt that she could not stand up to him right from the start.

If Raynesia was not a noblewoman, she would want to apologize: "I am very sorry, I will be careful from now on, please forgive me."...Even though she was not sure what she should be careful about, she just felt like saying this.

(But, the last time I had this feeling was when grandfather scolded me that one time...)

"You are not very willing correct?"

"Hm!"

He saw through her again.

Raynesia wondered if this Adventurer was a psychic. Raynesia didn't understand why his observation skills were so impressive, and she felt a little bit like crying. But Krusty maintained his gentleman's demeanor with a smile on his face.

"Please don't mind me."

"Alright, would you like some tea..."

"Thank you for your hospitality."

Krusty nodded in reply. Raynesia took out the tea set that was prepared beforehand, there was no other way now.

Her heart was heavy, not because she disliked him, she was just that way when she saw anyone. Anyway, even if she somehow managed to escape

from this young Adventurer, she would have to talk to other people this evening.

Compared to attending tea parties, or interacting with sons of other nobles akin to wedding interviews, killing time lazily in this pavilion was better.

This Adventurer's instincts seemed to be absurdly sharp. If that was the case, she wouldn't need to act like a lady. Since she had been seen through, just let him see as much as he wanted.

Raynesia prepared tea for two, then rested her upper body on the marble table. Raynesia stopped acting classy, and her skin was thick enough for her to act this way.

(Fufufu... be stunned by me.)

The granddaughter of a duke placed her whole forehead on the marble table and enjoyed its cool temperature. Even though there was a man present she could ignore him. How could there be such a luxurious thing in the world? Raynesia was certain there wasn't any, hooray for solitude, hooray for ignoring people. I need to look people in the eye? Feed that to the dogs instead.

But after 1 minute, 2 minutes, Krusty just quietly enjoyed his tea.

The chirps of the birds flowed into her ears.

From the clear sound of the chirping, the bird should be on the tree in the garden, or was it bathing in the fountain?

(Anyway, this man is so cold.)

For a normal knight, no, any normal gentleman, if they saw a young lady lying on the table, they would definitely express their concern. If a lady said she was unwell, they would escort her back to her room and look for female attendants to take care of her. Depending on the situation, maybe even find a doctor or a curse-removing mage.

But this young man Krusty was totally not acting this way.

"I am the most prominent person in the palace, if I announce that I am drinking tea with you, I would have an excuse to decline all activities or tea parties. Your parents will also praise you."

Krusty's words made Raynesia stop thinking.

As the meaning behind the words sink in, her face turned red. She felt fortunate to be lying on the marble table, even her parents had not seen her panic like this in recent years.

Embarrassment, shame, and a certain sweet sense of ease made her knees weak.

Krusty's words lay out exactly why she should drink tea with him.

"I was just talking to myself, please don't mind me."

Raynesia was unable to respond, just stayed down on the table with a beet-red face.

Part 5

Ragranda Forest.

It was dark inside, but not as narrow as they thought.

The ceiling was 3-5 meters tall, the path was 3 meters wide. The wall was made of stone, and the ground was laid with granite slabs close together.

The air was dry and had a taste of mold.

"I will provide some light."

Rundelhous chanted the spell Magic Torch, conjuring an orange-red light source.

"Is it okay to shine some light? Won't he become a target?"

Isuzu expressed her concern, but Rundelhous said "there is no difference."

"Since the monsters are mostly undead type, they will be fine even in the darkness as they will detect us by our life force or with magic. Being in pitch-dark will benefit them, so having a light is better."

Serara explained, and cast Bug's Light for a light source.

Preparing multiple light sources, that was one of the tactics in raiding dungeons. If the person casting the light source was defeated, they would lose the light and fall into darkness.

"Hmm, my light is brighter!"

Rundelhous seemed to not understand this concept, and cast another magic light to compete. Serara gave a bitter smile and explained the idea to him.

Rundelhous was hot-headed in the beginning, but calmed down and agreed after listening to the explanation. He said with a laugh: "So that is what this is about, it is not my light is too weak, I am an excellent mage, hahaha!"

This guy was unexpectedly frivolous.

Minori had this impression.

After a few bends in the path, they reached a room.

They stayed on guard, peeking into the room from behind the door. After looking for a while, there was no movement, so the group went in carefully.

"This is..."

There was a gap somewhere in the room, dry sand covered the stone floor, with tracks of several people passing by, and bones scattered all over the place.

"Seems like the party before us fought with skeletons here."

Minori inspected the tracks on the floor and concluded. She could almost see what happened here.

The footprints everywhere, signs of things being dragged, white bones, these clues told Minori about the battle that happened. It should have been over in less than a minute, an easy task. The monsters near the entrance usually had lower levels and were easy to deal with.

"I guess there will be no enemies until we reach the T junction."

Tohya said and led on.

The way he sniffed the air with his nose was just like your average kid brother.

The group stopped talking, and reached the T junction.

As expected, the footprints before them went to the left.

"..."

Rundelhous smirked in regret, Tohya nodded in response as they looked straight at the path to the left. Minori tilted her head in confusion, the two of them seemed to have come to a consensus.

"We will go this way today."

"That's right, I hope they don't think we want to take the route on the right."

Rundelhous said in response to Tohya.

The party went right with a roar from Tohya, following this would be the main event, they were going to a place where they had to be very alert.

"I.. feel nervous."

"Right."

Minori lowered her voice as she talked to Serara besides her.

The inside was very quiet, so there was not much point in lowering their voice, since they could still be heard clearly.

But because of the darkness and pressure of the dungeon, Minori became afraid in this atmosphere, and her voice would become soft involuntarily.

"Eh!"

The first to notice something wrong was Tohya walking in front. He found a group of 4 skeletons approaching them from the other end of the path.

Tohya instinctively drew his blade and charged.

"Tohya!"

Minori stopped him with a shout at the same time.

If Tohya charged into the enemy, the result would be the same as before.

Tohya also understood this. In the 2 months he spent in Log Horizon, Tohya had improved. He held his sword with its tip at eye level, and swung with a roar.

His blade flashed.

A deep red shockwave shot from the tip of the sword and hit a skeleton.

The impact did not cause much damage to the skeleton, but the squirming bone cracked slightly. They noticed the party's existence and hastily approached.

This skill was known as 'Vacuum Slash'.

Warrior class players were not proficient with ranged attacks, as their role was to be tanks and endure the enemies' onslaught. But they would be unable to handle certain situations. To balance this, they had a few skills with ranged attacks.

Samurai's 'Vacuum Slash' was one such ranged attack. Compared to classes proficient in ranged attacks, such as assassins' arrows and mage class' magic, the damage was minuscule. But it could attract the enemies attention without running into them, this skill was invaluable and convenient to samurai this way.

This skill served its function well. In the path illuminated by magic light sources, the skeleton moved towards Tohya in a creepy and smooth way.

3 of the skeletons had an axe, the other had a bow. The 4 of them seemed to be rushing in together, but 5 meters away, the skeleton with the bow stopped.

Tohya took up a stance in the middle of the path, exposing himself to the attacks of the 3 skeletons. The 3 skeletons with axes surrounded Tohya from 3 sides and attacked continuously. This was a mechanical movement devoid of emotion that was unique to undead types.

"Take this! Hahhhh!"

Tohya counterattacked, slashing at all the skeletons in sequence. This was a samurai skill, a powerful technique that had a long recast time, 'Big Whirlwind Slash'.

The skeletons fell instantly. But they didn't fall in vain, as their attacks hit Tohya in return, taking away 20% of Tohya's HP.

"Cleansing barrier!" "Heartbeat healing!"

Minori and Serara used their unique healing spells, casting them on Tohya at the same time.

A barrier like a water mirror formed around Tohya. Minori was using damage intercepting magic, stopping attacks 15% of Tohya's maximum HP. Simply put, instead of suffering 20% damage, Tohya would only take 5% damage with the barrier in place.

Serara's Heartbeat Healing was like the strong pulse of a beating heart, regenerating Tohya's HP gradually over time. This long term HP recovery spell would activate every second over a period of 15 seconds, recovering 20% of the HP would take 10 seconds.

Tohya's defense was guaranteed by the support of the two healers.

"I'm next! Take this!"

Rundelhous conjured a ball of magma from the tips of his fingers.

"Orb of Lava!"

The lava bullet did not fly in a straight line.

It pierced through the first skeleton, then bent at an angle before hitting another skeleton. The undead skeletons crumbled under the heat, with one shattering and another catching fire.

Rundelhous was a sorcerer, one of the mage classes. In a way, it was a complete attacker class.

They were known for their strong attack power.

Similar to assassins taking weapon attacks to their limits, taking magical attacks to their limits would be sorcerers.

They could not be like summoners that conjured creatures to do their bidding, or like enchanters who raised the potential of their allies.

Sorcerers used primal and strong magic, turning their magic power directly into destructive powers. These destructive forces usually took the form of fire, water, or lightning, and could be directed at the enemy to defeat them in an instant.

Sorcerers' attack power, along with assassins', were the peak of the 12 classes. Compared to assassins simply attacking with weapons, sorcerers

could choose to attack based on the enemies' type affinity, which many players felt was even better.

"Hmm? Ah? Woah!"

Rundelhous shouted in surprise.

After the lava ball pierced the enemies, the tip of his staff shot out a rainbow beam, following the path of the ball causing additional damage.

"That's great! It worked!"

Isuzu gave a brilliant and sweet smile.

Bard had many support skills, which was a unique feature of the bard to many players. Their skill variety had a very wide range.

In terms of supporting allies, even enchanters did not match up to bards.

Isuzu chose to activate the permanent status buff song 'Harmony Carol' today. The effect of this permanent status buff song activated when the magic attacks of allies hit, and would automatically follow up with another attack.

"Impressive! This is... a bard's skill? Miss Isuzu, my artistic and destructive magic has raised to a legendary level! Hahahaha! How beautiful, well done!"

This support seemed to greatly raise Rundelhous' morale.

He gave Isuzu a thumbs-up and a wink that she could almost hear.

Rundelhous with his western European handsome appearance looked like a Hollywood movie star when he made this action, he looked so charming that it was troubling.

His lofty attitude when talking might be due to his sheltered upbringing, but from his pure words, he didn't seem to be a bad guy.

(And the attack is so strong...)

As expected of a sorcerer, even though they took some damage from Tohya's area attack, and received support from a bard. But to take out 3 skeleton with one attack was an impressive feat.

In Elder Tales, it was rare to see such an one-sided battle.

Using Tohya as an example, if he fought with a monster of the same level 1-on-1, he would need at least 10 rounds to defeat him. The attack of healer classes was even weaker, it would take 20 attacks for Minori.

Even if the enemies' levels were lower than Rundelhous', to defeat them in one attack was astonishing.

But...

"Hold on, there is more!"

"What is it, Miss Minori? Did you fall in love after witnessing my beautiful magic?"

Rundelhous was struck in the back of his head as he was twirling around. It was an arrow from the skeleton archer.

"Ah..." "Ah...." "Eh..." "This is bad..."

"What... What is going on!"

Rundelhous turned around.

His attack hit all 4 enemies, but Tohya's attack did not hit the skeleton archer, and he was still moving because of that.

"Woah, you bastard!"

"I...I will heal you!"

Minori used Minor Heal as first aid.

Tohya did not want the enemy to have a chance to attack and rushes the skeleton archer.

But that was a mistake. The charging Tohya was discovered by a new group of skeleton in another corner of the pathway, attracting enemy reinforcements.

Sorcerers had high attack power and were a powerful weapon for attacking the enemies, but they were not invincible.

The high attacks would agitate the monsters. In the monsters' eyes, the most threatening player would be prioritized in their attacks. And sorcerers had the same fate of all mage classes, they could only equip armor with low defense ratings and had low innate defense.

That group that came from around the corner had 5 skeletons, adding the skeleton archer left over, there were 6 enemies.



And Tohya pushing ahead made the formation unstable.

(This will become a free-for-all battle. No, I need to stay calm in this situation, starting with a party-wide damage intercept spell as insurance...)

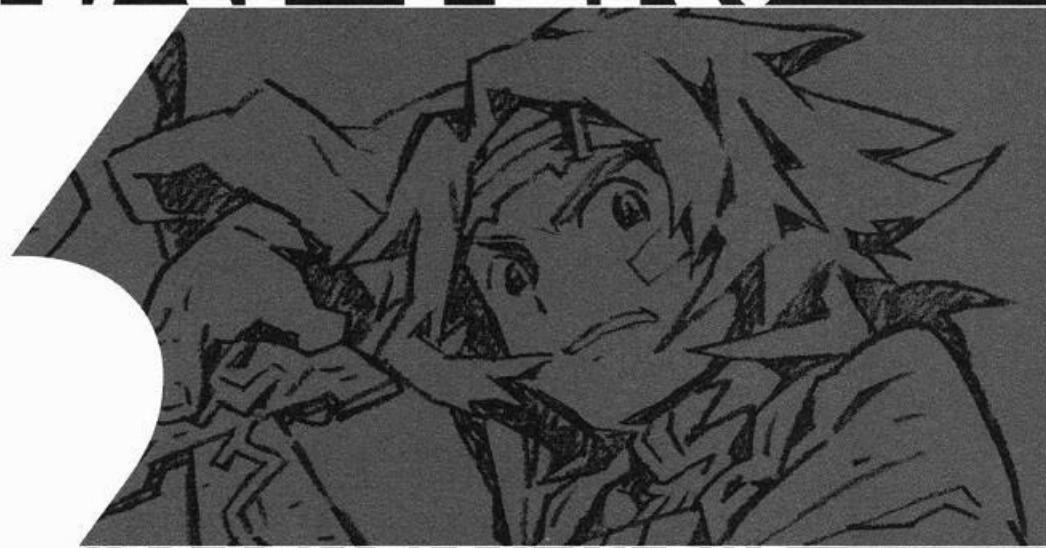
But Minori's thoughts already lacked calmness.

Party-wide damage intercept spell was a powerful skill with a long casting time, Rundelhous could not afford to wait and used his attack spell again. He attracted the attention of the skeletons away from Tohya, and they just left the vanguard Tohya behind, making their way to the rear guard where Minori and the others were stationed.

The skeleton archer continued his ranged attack on Rundelhous, and his HP slowly moved to the red danger zone.

In the center of the narrow tunnel, a free-for-all fight erupted.

CHAPTER.



NEGOTIATION IN THE ANCIENT COURT

[古宮廷での交渉]

► NAME: SHOURYLIL

► LEVEL: 90

► RACE: WOLF FANG

► CLASS: SWASHBUCKER

► HP: 10408

► MP: 8943

► ITEM 1:
[LIGHTNING CLAW WIND FANG]
STRAIGHT SWORDS EXCLUSIVE FOR SWASHBUCKER. THEY ARE TWO SEPARATE WEAPONS, BUT THEY GIVE BONUS EFFECTS EQUIPPED TOGETHER, MOST PLAYERS PREFER TO USE THEM AS A SET. INCREASES CRITICAL HIT DAMAGE WHEN USED BY WOLF FANG.

► ITEM 2:
[MARTIAL ARTIST LEATHER ARMOR]
SLIGHTLY HEAVY PHYSICAL DEFENSE ARMOR, LESS EFFECTIVE AGAINST SPECIAL AND ELEMENTAL ATTACKS. INGREDIENTS INCLUDE WYVERN LEATHER THAT CAN BE OBTAINED FROM COMPLETING QUEST, CAN BE GATHERED QUITE EASILY.

► ITEM 3:
[WOLF CUB NECKLACE]
JADE NECKLACE WITH A LARGE GEMSTONE IN THE MIDDLE, WITH A CARVING OF THE LEGENDARY MOTHER WOLF THAT NURSES BABIES ABANDONED IN THE WILDERNESS. INCREASE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF RECOVERY PRODUCTS CONSUMED BY THE PARTY.

<table width=60%><tr><td width=25%; valign="top">

Name: Shouryuu

Level: 90

Race: Wolf Fang

Class: Swashbuckler

HP: 10408

MP: 8943<td>Equipment

Lightning Claw Wind Fang
 Straight swords exclusive to Swashbucklers. They are two separate weapons, but they give bonus effects equipped together, most players prefer to use them as a set. Increase critical hit damage when used by Wolf Fang.

Martial Artist Leather Armor
 Slightly heavy physical defense armor, less effective against special and elemental attacks. Ingredients include Wyvern leather that can be obtained from completing quest, can be gathered quite easily.

Wolf Club Necklace
 Jade necklace with a large gemstone in the middle, with a carving of the legendary mother wolf that nursed babies abandoned in the wilderness. Increase effectiveness of recovery products consumed by the party.

Chapter 3: Negotiation in the ancient court

Part 1

(Ha, seems like this is a nest of wily foxes.)

Michitaka took the glass with a smile while complaining in his heart. This was the 'Ancient Palace of Eternal Ice', but not the zone reserved for the Round Table Council, this was the zone Marquis Dalute was residing in.

As Shiroe predicted, the 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal' meeting was progressing slowly.

From the news they received, meetings would be held in the afternoons occasionally. But in the 4 days since Michitaka arrived at the 'Ancient Palace of Eternal Ice', there had yet to be a single meeting.

The event lasted for 10 days, so there was no need to rush. That was the opinion of one of the nobles, but on the contrary, there was a lot of turbulence in the under table negotiations.

The proof was the numerous invitations the Round Table Council had received. Shiroe, Krusty, and Michitaka attended the discussion together in the beginning, but they had to split up in order to process all the invites.

They came up with a basic policy beforehand, and used a weapon not available to the People of the Land...telepathy. These two factors had been of great assistance.

They would be helpful tonight as well.

Marquis Dalute from the Fortress City Mogami's banquet.

'League of Freedom Towns Eastal's young knights' evening party.

Tsukuba's Marquis Kyriva's and its university's dinner party.

The 3 invitations clashed.

If they only attended one, there would be negative effects on the power balance between the nobles. In order to be impartial to all the lords, they also thought of declining them all. But collecting intelligence and building relationships took priority, so they decided to divide and conquer.

Since it was an evening party with young knights, there should be musical performances or dances. Because of this, Shiroe was nominated to attend it. But Tsukuba's Marquis Kyriva's dinner party had scholars attending, which would be a heavy burden on Krusty and Michitaka.

So Krusty would be going to the young knights' and princesses' party... which was the gathering of future leaders. Shiroe said with a mischievous smile: "It must be so much fun to dance", it seemed like he was still holding a grudge from before.

Crescent Moon Alliance's Henrietta was also worried about the dancing part, but Krusty replied calmly: "I found a highly durable shield recently, I just need some technique to use it to protect me, allowing me to not dance without appearing obtrusive, so there is no problem."

Michitaka did not know what Krusty was talking about, so he just shrugged and left it to him. Michitaka couldn't do much to help anyway.

With two of the events decided, only he was left to attend Marquis Dalute's banquet.

"Here, I brought the best beef from my territory, please enjoy the feast tonight!"

Marquis Dalute received Michitaka with these words. You could say he was simple, but being a bit more mean, you could describe him as an old fashioned middle-aged man. His clothes were clean and made from high quality materials, but it had no designs or accessories on it, making him look plain.

Michitaka was a section chief salaryman in the real world, but he was the guild master of the largest production guild Oceanic Systems in Akiba, leading 5000 members. The members saw him as a sensible brother, but that alone was not enough to operate this massive guild. He was not dense enough to not see through the Marquis' intent.

Despite that, Michitaka still greeted him warmly, accepting Marquis Dalute's offer and took a seat. Around the extravagant feast table was the Marquis' family.

His wife was very young, a slightly plump beauty, maybe his 2nd wife. The elder son about the age of the last couple of grades in elementary school, seemed like a strong youth. There was also a young daughter.

"The food has changed dramatically in the past 2 months, I have brought along my top chefs with high motivation to this meeting."

The banquet started after Marquis Dalute's opening speech. The Fortress City Mogami... Territory of Marquis Dalute, was situated in the northeast of this region. According to the map created by Shiroe, it was in Yamagata Prefecture.

The city had about 8000 people, according to Lord Dalute, it was a comfortable and safe city. Reviewing the data collated earlier, there were ten-odd villages under Marquis Dalute's governance.

The feast consisted of extravagant Middle Ages European styled dishes.

Michitaka did not know the details, but from his experience, a meal such as French cuisine would serve food in small portion to the table. But in this alternate world, the nobles seemed to be accustomed to large portions of food.

Beef steaks roasted with lots of spices were served, and Dalute cut them into fine portions himself.

"This meat is reputed to be top class in my territory, how does it taste?"

"Yes, this is delicious!"

Michitaka praised the meal between bites.

This was indeed top class, compared to beef in the real world, this meat was tougher and brought a sense of wilderness with it and its original taste was very rich.

Marquis Dalute focused on introducing the tastiness of this dish.

(So that's how it is...)

In this alternate world, cuisines were a critical part of the political world, the change 2 months ago revolutionized the world.

All the other lords made preparations similar to Marquis Dalute, bringing their top chefs and ingredients to attend the meeting. This meeting was an opportunity that appeared suddenly. Small and weak territories might be able to gain immense wealth if they discovered any popular ingredients or dishes. The stronger nobles would seek higher quality foods to solidify their influence and fame.

The 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal' meeting was a place where you compared your social standings, but food had now taken center stage, becoming crucial to a city's economy with its trade around the region.

"My city is surrounded by hills and the lands are full of slopes. Lumber, mining, and livestock trades thrive there. For our feast tonight, we will also be serving pork that we are proud of."

Looking at the anticipation of the elder son, he could tell this would be a wonderful dish.

Michitaka enjoyed the food while listening to Marquis Dalute's words.

The Marquis' wife joined in the conversation occasionally, chatting about the weather, geography, and culture of the northeast part of the archipelago. For the Marquis, this was preparation for business talks and a display of the features of his territory. For Michitaka, this was valuable intelligence.

The northeast region of the archipelago was full of mountain ranges, with forests spread all over the place. The hilly region was full of nature, holding inexhaustible amounts of forest resources. The rainfall was abundant, with many lakes and beautiful rivers flowing in the region.

There were few flat lands, most of them near the coast or in the mountain valley.

These even plains were primarily used for wheat or rice.

From the northeast to the north of Kanto, this whole region was the central zone of the 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal'. The biggest problem with this zone lay with the rampage of monsters.

The kind-hearted humans were one of the races players in Elder Tales were able to choose. According to Shiroe's and Rodrick's calculations, the population here was roughly 1% of the real Japan's. But the population was not equivalent to the number of intelligent beings, such as demihumans like goblins or orcs. Their intelligence was not at the level of the kind-hearted humans, but they had strong bodies and high reproduction abilities. Most importantly, they were cruel and evil.

The evil demihumans in the world built empires and ruled over regions, pillaging day and night in an attempt to rule the world.

The main monster forces in the northeast archipelago were goblins. Goblins were short demihumans, about 150cm in height. They were skinny, ugly, and twisted short humanoid monsters. They had a simple tribal society, living together taking on different jobs.

Most of them belonged to roaming and pillaging tribes, but some of the tribes might settle in one location. The northeastern tribes trended towards staying in one place, and even built gigantic communities with populations reaching tens of thousands.

Similar to other demihumans, goblins had hybrids of low social status from cross-breeding. One such hybrid were the hobgoblins, which were more violent than goblins, but maniacally loyal. They were armed with armor and weapons, willing to fight to the death for their tribesman.

There were also high-class goblin shamans who could summon the spirits of their ancestors, commanding undead monsters and spirits. Goblin tamers would breed creatures like Owlbears, Hippogriffs and dire wolves.

Goblins individually were weaker than mid-level adventurers, but had a variety of abilities. They were a force to be reckoned with.

The zones demihuman lived in differed from those ruled by humans. In this case, it should be described as humans were fighting to protect the land from them. In the northeast, the demihumans lived in the deep mountains and the dense forests.

"But, the situation is changing... yes, because of the revolution."

Marquis Dalute continued.

"Firstly, the food has been affected greatly by the revolution. As you can tell, the citizens in my territory have been completely charmed by the new dishes, there is nothing I can do about that."

The Marquis said seriously. His wife cut in with a bitter smile.

"You are also engrossed in the Pecorino salad and smoked bacon. You are putting it like the citizens are the only lazy bums desiring good food, that is despicable."

The lady smiled mischievously, Michitaka nodded and replied.

"Yes, great food can make the days seem better, it is a wonderful thing."

"Cough, cough, anyway, there seems to be such a thing too... After the revolution, our citizens are also motivated, production rates have improved. Rice takes a long time to harvest, so there is no significant change there, but vegetables and livestock have major developments. Put simply, in order to eat delicious food, the farmers are more careful in breeding and harvesting, and are careful to avoid wastage in deliveries."

Michitaka nodded to acknowledge, thinking this was a good summary.

"The demand for good ingredients spurs the entrepreneurial minds of the people, and they focus on producing delicious ingredients for a good price, allowing them to get other ingredients... a cycle like this."

Michitaka was from a production guild, so he understood perfectly and nodded.

"And because of this...there are some problems in delivery."

Michitaka thought about it.

This was obvious. Their lands consisted mainly of hills, and was not suitable for some types of grains. There were also many ingredients that could only be planted in the south. Michitaka also had a hard time getting sugar which was exclusively produced in the south.

Sugar was the native product of 'Ninetail Sovereign'. After the Catastrophe, because of the low supply level, its price was increasing without restraint.

It wasn't like this before.

The food in the past all tasted the same, so the quality of the ingredients would not have any effect on the final product... In other words, sugar was akin to medical supply.

(No, that is not a meal, just a nutritious ration.)

But it was different now, with delicious ingredients and fresh products. There was an increase in demand for different foods. In this pure and simple alternate world, they were basically using the products from their own land.

Delivery required time and resources, delivering fresh produce took even more effort. But things like seasoning, tobacco, alcohol, or tea, there was a

need to import it from far. To fund the import of these goods, the fastest way was through export.

And the biggest barrier to this was monsters.

When you thought of that, you could understand the feeling of nobles who wanted to request for mercenaries from the Round Table Council.

"To sum it up, this is not simply a request for Mogami."

Marquis Dalute shrugged.

"But I heard that raiding just one hill will require a few hundred soldiers. To exterminate the goblins from the northeast archipelago, you would need an astronomical number. Just depending on Akiba's forces would not be enough. It's a shame, even if it is just guarding the city, our numbers are unable to maintain a full day watch indefinitely."

Michitaka replied.

Security for the whole region was beyond their scope of consideration, the population of this world was not enough to secure all the zones. And it was because of this dangerous world, that the human communities were sparse like the bubbles in an ocean, they could only live in peaceful zones centered around cities.

On the other hand, there was a hint in Michitaka's statement.

Before the Marquis could propose 'deal with the other territories later, please send soldiers to me first', he had subtly warned him, displaying an attitude of 'if we are sending help, we need to be fair to all the zones, if we can't do that we won't send help blindly.'

The banquet was moving on to desserts.

Uncertain if this was a local flavor or if it was a result of 2 months of research, the sweet pancakes had a taste of nostalgia. As Michitaka complemented this simple desert with black rose tea, Marquis Dalute said seriously.

"No, there is no need to destroy the monsters, I am asking for something else, providing access to sea delivery."

Michitaka was dumbstruck.

Ferrying by sea, that was providing them with the steam powered ship.

Marquis Dalute's proposal allowed them to bypass the monsters without spending resources to defeat them, and made import and export smoother.

Part 2

The atmosphere inside the tent was heavy.

In fact, it was suffocating.

Isuzu turned in her sleeping bag.

They just had dinner, and the campfire was still visible through the tent's canvas, the time should be 9pm? According to the real world, it was not sleeping time yet, but there was nothing to do in this vast nature even if you stayed up.

Even though there was nothing to do, she was still tired and listless, but she couldn't sleep even if she lay down.

She got into her sleeping bag with many things on her mind.

There were people in the tent using magical lights, or taking care of their equipment.

"Woo..."

Isuzu looked towards the light.

Minori who was always working hard, Tohya who was in a bag like Isuzu, Serara who was lying in a corner of the tent, Rundelhous who was sitting on his bag with his arms crossed, looking displeased.

Everyone had a heavy air about them.

This could not be helped, since their raid ended miserably.

The battle of Isuzu's group evolved into a free-for-all, attracting skeleton monsters as reinforcements and becoming a battle of attrition.

In this chaotic formation, it not only hurt the groups' HP, it also drained a lot of MP, their reserved skills, and their focus. They could manage with their

HP full in the beginning, but if it dragged too long they would need to rely on healing spells.

But even healing spells were limited by MP, and that was also gone as the battle went on.

'...Because you did not heal properly that I had to suffer such grave injuries!' Rundelhous complained, but from what Isuzu saw, Serara and Minori had been giving their all.

Isuzu did not know how healing worked, but seeing the exhausted Serara and the troubled Minori, she could tell they held nothing back.

Isuzu was one of the beginners rescued from Hamelin, her class was bard.

She had been close to Minori since their time in Hamelin.

You could say she took good care of her.

Minori, a middle school girl 3 years her junior, was a very capable girl.

Isuzu had great respect for this young girl who had a lower level and less experience than her. Minori's use of the phrase 'the knowledge Shiroe-san shared with me' was one of the reasons, but the main reasons she respected her were her courage, foresight, and intelligence.

(Because I am clumsy... I have to keep relying on Minori-chan...)

Isuzu thought as she sulked in her sleeping bag, recalling all her experiences. She felt that she was useless in this situation.

She joined the band in high school, her interest was instruments, the contrabass in particular.

She was tall and skinny like an athlete with a hormone disorder during puberty (her stamina was not good too), and she thought her face was not ugly, just plain, but still a long way from being beautiful.

Freckles were her biggest concern, her hair was thick too. Even tying them into braids didn't keep them in place, which made her depressed.

She had a number of friends, and was not bullied. But she was just a normal mass-produced pumpkin high school girl you could find anywhere.

She started playing the netgame on a spur of the moment, because her brother who loved the piano said: "I have extra passes, want to try playing it?" so she tried it.

It was interesting in the beginning, and you could choose the class bard which was related to music, which made her happy. Even so, she was not really into it. If someone asked her if she would continue playing if they charged her money, she probably wouldn't.

Isuzu was then involved in the Catastrophe and was trapped in the evil guild Hamelin.

She felt lost in the beginning, her head filled with confused thoughts, and slowly she fell into a deep... yes, deep sense of despair.

Isuzu was in absolute despair, her hopes were crushed, she gave up fighting, hated god and the world. She became an empty shell with her repeated sense of hate, and thought of nothing but feeding herself every day.

'Ah, this must be how the children in poverty nations lived,' she complained with a miserable feeling. Even if she resisted maniacally, deep in her heart she still accepted this. She could hear her heart saying in a tired voice. This was how the story ended for side-characters.

Isuzu had been defeated by the Catastrophe.

Minori treated the other beginners well even under these conditions.

Something like knowledge could be shared, but hogging it had its uses. By hogging it, you could save yourself in critical moments.

Despite that, Minori chatted with the other beginners in the room every day, sharing what she knew about the game.

Her brother Tohya was also the same in a sense.

The fact that both of them were in middle school shocked Isuzu.

They were strong in a way that could only be described as special. Isuzu felt that without Minori, she would fall into deeper depravity in Hamelin, and she wouldn't be able to regain her cheerful character.

On the other hand, Serara was about her age.

After Isuzu was saved from Hamelin, the first person to give her hot soup and bread was Serara. The conditions in Hamelin were very bad, even if it was wrong to say this herself, she was probably very smelly when she was rescued.

But Serara hugged Isuzu and said: "Don't worry, you are safe now."

The guild hall was like a refugee camp that day, the beginners were all crying badly, Serara told them: "I am also a beginner, my level is about the same as yours."

"I was also also targeted by human traffickers in Susukino, but I was saved and I am living normally in the guild now."

Serara's words must have saved many of them.

In Crescent Moon Alliance, Serara was one of the members who took good care of the beginners. Isuzu felt close to her as they were about the same age. They were now best friends in Crescent Moon Alliance, spending almost every day together.

Because of the above reasons, Isuzu saw Minori and Serara as trustworthy acquaintances. Actually, they were already friends, but she had an inexplicable feeling that she needed their permission before that happened, or she would feel bad about this declaration. Because of this feeling, Isuzu addressed them as acquaintances, but thought of them as friends in her heart.

So they could not have been sloppy in their healing duties, Isuzu knew them well.

So, what was the reason behind the miserable state they were in? Whose fault was it?

This question confounded Isuzu.

The free-for-all battle lasted about 30 minutes.

After making it through this fight where it wouldn't be strange if any of them died, their party was in a miserable state. They had used up all their MP and their high cool-down skills. If they were detected and had to fight again, they would definitely be wiped out.

The party rushed back to the entrance in a hurry, but they were attacked by the skeletons that respawned on their way back, and had to fight a miserable retreating battle...

(Today was really bad...)

A total loss.

Isuzu's party's first dungeon challenge, set a record of 1 hour before retreating.

(It is not Tohya's fault.)

Isuzu didn't know Tohya as well as Minori, but they are acquaintances.

Isuzu saw him as a good cheerful kid, was this a result of Tohya not doing his job or playing around? If someone asked Isuzu, she would answer no.

In their short raid, Tohya did charge in by himself and seemed to have made a mistake in doing so. But if you analyzed the case, you would feel that 'it might be a mistake, but Tohya had his reasons, you cannot blame him based solely on that'.

Isuzu also thought of other reasons.

For instance, she only knew Rundelhous through this training camp. His character and strength were unknown to the party.

Rundelhous was lofty when he talked, had a snobbish attitude, his proud and boastful demeanor was a pain. Even if he was handsome like a prince, judging by Isuzu's standard, he was a frivolous man.

Was Rundelhous the reason for today's defeat? If someone asked her, she could only give a big question mark.

Rundelhous' overconfidence and carelessness made the situation worse, but similar to Tohya, his actions were based on his considerations in order to achieve victory.

Most importantly, Rundelhous loved his class and worked hard to display his strengths, there was no doubt about that, since Rundelhous had narcissistic tendencies. He considered destroying the enemy to be a virtue, there was no way he went easy on them.

(He is not a bad guy...)

Isuzu thought it was true.

Isuzu peeked at Rundelhous from this position. Rundelhous was pouting and crossed his arms over his chest, which felt like a monk training under the waterfall.

He looked totally Caucasian, so he was very prominent, but his attitude was very serious.

(He must be doing an after action review by himself...)

...Isuzu thought he might be self-reproaching. Rundelhous always said whatever came to mind, and had been blaming the others for the today's adventure. But he was also strict with himself and seemed to be deeply remorseful.

(Haaaaah...)

If it was like this, doesn't that mean that no one was at fault?

(No no no, hold on for a moment, this is not right.)

Yes, there was one person she did not consider, that was Isuzu herself. Unable to deny the fact that she might be the reason for the party's crisis.

(I am not good at this...)

No matter how you diced it, Isuzu was a beginner in this game, and had no martial arts background. She never thought of survival in the wilderness in the real world, so she should be bad at fighting.

But it had been 2 months.

Isuzu knew she had been through many battles in this world, maybe she would never be used to fighting no matter what, was it going to be this exhausting forever? And Isuzu was different from Tohya, she was a rear guard support class, not meant to tank direct attacks from the enemy.

But as she reviewed the day, Isuzu felt that there were many areas that felt wrong for today's adventure. Her wrong referred to 'in hindsight, this is not the best course of action'.

Why didn't they know it will end up like this? Reviewing the day, she felt she made many mistakes.

Bards had a variety of supports, the most important being the permanent status buff song.

This was a music that bards emitted subconsciously from their body.

The permanent buff that was effective for the whole party would go on forever as long as the bard willed it. By using permanent status buff songs at the beginning of the adventure, they wouldn't need to do anything else for it to continue its effect. It was a skill players wanted to use whenever possible.

The problem with permanent status buff songs was that you could only use 2 at a time. High-level bards would learn up to 15 songs, but Isuzu at this stage had only learned 10.

Choosing 2 out of these 10 songs was a bothersome choice all bards will face, and would continue to have even if they reached the level cap.

Isuzu chose 'Harmony Carol' and 'Speedy Sword Etude'.

The former granted an additional attack for every successful attack, the latter was a support song that raised weapon attack speed. They were both basic support songs bards commonly used.

But the battle failed because of that.

'Harmony Carol' could increase the damage from magical attacks, but it attracted more attention to Rundelhous, something she did not expect.

And the number of enemies was more than expected, causing the battle to turn into a free-for-all.

At that point in time, Isuzu decided to change the support song even though she was in the middle of a battle. Changing support songs required a long casting time, which was best performed when not in battles. She also hesitated and wasted a lot of time before deciding that maintaining the current situation would result in them being wiped out, and changed the support song.

'Harmony Carol' changed to 'Meditation Nocturne'.

'Speedy Sword Etude' changed to 'Dancing Peacock Melody'.

'Meditation Nocturne' was a support song that recovered MP even if you were in battle. In Elder Tales, you would recover MP slowly as long as you were not in battle. It would recover speedily if you rested. But you could not recover MP if you were in battle.

'Meditation Nocturne' was a support song that allowed party members to recover MP even in battle, but it was much slower than the recovery rate during resting.

'Dancing Peacock Melody' raised the agility of all party members, a support song that helped them evade enemy attacks.

Since there were reinforcements, the battle would be long. No, it had already been a dragging fight before Isuzu decided to change her songs. She changed the support songs once she determined it was going to take quite a while.

That's all she could do then, she still didn't think she was wrong now.

But from the results, this judgement call did not improve the battle situation.

Evade rate increased, the drain of MP dropped, the support song was supporting the party as intended, recovering their MP.

But this also meant that 'Harmony Carol' and 'Speedy Sword Etude' which increased damage were no longer in effect.

With lower damage, it took more time to defeat one enemy. Being slow in taking down the enemy also meant the battle was going to be longer... which caused the HP to be in a healthy range, but MP to be drained faster.

This was a vicious cycle.

(But...)

Yes, she had to say but.

Isuzu didn't think this was a mistake. Even if it was one, that was only at the level of 'not going with the best choice'... which was the same level as

Tohya and Rundelhous. She didn't think this was the reason for the battle falling into chaos.

Anyway, if this was a mistake, what should she have done instead?

Isuzu thought.

(Actually, I am not good at thinking...)

She was not good at setting a battle plan.

Analyzing and executing were areas Isuzu was not proficient in, but compared to thinking, Isuzu was even worse at dealing with the heavy atmosphere in the tent.

So she carried this feeling like a heavy rock in her stomach, and continued to worry.

Not only Isuzu, all the beginners in the tent including Minori and Tohya were the same.

As they killed time with their worries, their first night in the Sand Leaf Hill region had only begun.

Part 3

Even if it was described as a 'small hall', it was still bigger than a classroom in the old world. In this small hall, with music played by beautiful ladies in the background, the people in the room were gathered in many small circles.

This was the 'Ancient Palace of Eternal Ice'.

In a corner of its upper level was 'The Hall of Seven Maidens'.

Young knights stood around and chatted cheerfully, noble ladies sat on the classy couches that were placed all over the hall, gossiping and laughing happily. There were also the courteous sons of nobles, moody scholars with bitter smiles, and frail looking bureaucrats.

This was supposed to be a party where the young people of the 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal' gathered without regard to their titles and positions. Their ages ranged from 15-20, with about 40 people attending.

"...Are you planning to stay here the whole night?"

"Yes."

Krusty replied without hesitation to Raynesia who was sitting across the small round table.

Raynesia tried to reply with a smile, but her face seemed to be cramping up.

Raynesia did not find Krusty annoying.

This bulky knight was a man of few words, and would not say any pleasantries common among nobles. In simple terms, Raynesia didn't have to pretend to be a 'gentle lady in the rain', thank god for that.

But she was a daughter of the Corwen clan.

If she spent too much time with a single man, who knew what sort of rumors would spread. If it were only during this party, it should be fine. But if this carried on, what would they say about her? Raynesia was starting to get depressed.

(Does this man understand things like this...)

Krusty was drinking alcoholic black rose tea unfazed. The two of them had been occupying these seats since the party started an hour ago. But they did not have a proper conversation in this whole time.

In the short term, they both stood to benefit by maintaining this situation. This helped Raynesia by keeping the nobles, knights and bureaucrats and their hollow pleasantries at bay, giving her the room to breathe.

She was the granddaughter of the leading nobleman Duke Sergead.

In the whole of Yamato, there were only 2 clans with the noble title of Duke, they were the noble of the nobles. This title was bestowed by Westelande during ancient times. After the fall of the ancient empire, only the clan that watched over the grave of Westelande, clan Itsuki, ranked higher than clan Corwen.

With a lineage as prestigious as this, there were many knights and bureaucrats who wanted to woo her. Raynesia had an elder sister and a kid brother. With her sister moving away after her marriage, clan Corwen

needed either Raynesia to take a husband into the family or her brother to take in a wife in order to pass down the clan name. With this background, it was not surprising to see so many nobles and knights her age adoring and yearning for her.

(Ha...)

When she thought about things like that, her heart felt heavy, and she couldn't help but sigh. Raynesia treated marriage as an unknown country far away from here. Her parents' relationship seemed more cautious than common wedded couples, while her sister's in-laws seemed to stick together like glue.

Raynesia was unable to judge which one was the real husband and wife.

She felt that living together with a stranger of the opposite gender seemed ridiculous, but her position didn't allow her to stay single.

Actually, you couldn't describe your husband as a stranger, but Raynesia didn't think that far.

When the young nobles and princesses saw Raynesia's sorrowful expression, they would say: "Raynesia-sama seems sorrowful..." or "She should be worried about the future of the world, what a refined and cultured lady..." or something like this. But she didn't take their words to heart.

The other main character in their gossip, Krusty, was also enjoying the benefits of being with Raynesia. The topic of their conversations described him as the young leader of the Round Table Council, the group governing the biggest coalition of Adventurers.

With a force of 15,000, and every one of them being stronger than their common knights. If you converted them in terms of a noble's army, they could easily reach tens of thousands in terms of battle power. Apart from this, their economy might not be as big as 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal' biggest city Maihama's, but they were not far behind.

They were a powerful influence that suddenly appeared in 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal'.

Even if you took away all this, Krusty himself was still a remarkable man.

Taller than 190cm, he was considered very tall among humans, but he did not give the impression of being thin and lanky. With his bulging muscles and strong body, you could tell just by looking that he was a top-class warrior.

Even when he sat down quietly, his glasses and sensible face made him look like a nobleman, his sand-colored hair also suited him.

Even if you took away the fact that he was an Adventurer, he still had a strong charm about him, drawing the curiosity and adoration of the ladies.

During the knights' exhibition matches held 2 days ago, he wore a deep blue heavy armor with scratches and scars all over it. The knights who were proud of their beautiful and shiny armor all hesitated in challenging him when they saw his armor. Those who did spar with him were totally enchanted by Krusty's excellent skills.

Krusty was not willing to become the center of attention. But by being with Raynesia, he was able to avoid tedious invitations or be caught in troublesome schemes, at least that's what he said.

(Boohoo...)

Raynesia looked at Krusty with hate. Krusty had been 100% ignoring her all this while, but he chose this moment to raise his head and look behind Raynesia.

"Princess Raynesia?

"Sorry for interrupting your chat, May I ask... Is it convenient for us to join in? We brought cookies."

The two young ladies were Marquis Lestar's daughter Appletta and granddaughter of Iwafune's Baron, Febuelle. This was their first time at the party, Raynesia's batchmates.

"Of course you can... Sir Krusty, are you fine with that?"

Raynesia answered with a perfect smile. Krusty also responded like a gentleman, standing up with a smile and pulling 2 elegant chairs over for the ladies. Not sure where he learned that from, but he moved so smoothly that it was a joy to watch.

(...What is this, so he knows how to act like a gentleman in a party... So he knows how to give ladies a proper reception... Woo...)

The 2 young ladies seeming relieved, offered Krusty cookies and started to chat. From Raynesia's perspective, princesses and knights would both look at her with admiration. But girls wouldn't woo her, so handling them was much easier.

But Raynesia had no common interests with them, even when they talked about new perfumes and gowns, Raynesia was unable to keep up with the conversation.

She didn't understand why she didn't like perfume.

The smell was too strong.

No, if no one bothered Raynesia, she might not bathe for a week, so she might be more smelly. She tried to explain from the angle of personal preference. But the fact was there would always be someone to bother her. Her maid would throw her into the shower every day, and perfume would be sprayed on her from head to toe.

As for dresses, she thought they were uncomfortable. They either showed too much skin or had too much decoration, a costume that was hard to live in.

Raynesia liked cotton pajamas.

The cotton pajamas that were comfortable to the touch were the best. Silk also felt nice, but she didn't like silk pajamas, they were uncomfortable to sleep in.

Put simply, she just wanted to pass the whole day in pajamas and sleep in her bed.

"...Princess Raynesia, you also agree right?"

Appletta and Febuelle gave cute smiles, Raynesia reacted instinctively and said: "Yes, that's right." and smiled in return.

Receiving permission from Raynesia, the two girls chatted by themselves happily. Raynesia's heart was sweating like crazy, she just agreed on the

spur of the moment, but she was daydreaming and had no idea what they were talking about.

"Krusty-sama, Raynesia-sama is beautiful right?"

"Yes, I am honored."

Krusty replied, making the 2 princesses laugh. The two girls were very cute to Raynesia too, they were very different from her, they had cute personalities.

"?"

"But... Princess Raynesia is a kind lady, she only said that to show her concern for a banquet beginner like myself."

"There is no such thing, Krusty-sama is a gallant knight."

(Eh, hmm?)

Raynesia's expression was a gentle smile, but her heart was in a mess.

From the conversation, the two princess were praising Krusty, and she also agreed with them.

Raynesia was doted on by her grandfather, so she made her debut at a later age. But these two girls were different, she remembered they were only 15-16 years old. In their eyes, the older Krusty was a knight they admired. Thanks to the age difference, they were able to join in the conversation of this table, and not hesitate like the other princesses.

The two of them complimented Krusty, Raynesia went with the flow and agreed... this should be the situation right now.

(I hope it is just a normal compliment!)

"Princess Raynesia is accompanying me like this because she is concerned about me being unfamiliar with the customs of the courts, and is saving me from making a fool of myself. I feel that I am unworthy of this honor."

Krusty said smoothly to the two young girls, being a man of few words was totally a lie.

(He... He is a bad man! Super bad man!)

"Krusty-sama, allow me to introduce you to others..."

"Or would you prefer to play Chaturanga with us over there?" <TL
note:ancient chess game>

The two of them suggested excitedly.

"Thank you for the offer, but no. Princess Febuelle, Princess Appletta, I am just an uncultured man who only knows about the battlefield. And Princess Raynesia is willing to sympathize with a brute like me. To repay her kindness, I need to stay right by her side."

Krusty was probably just too lazy to entertain the other nobles, but he said this with a face full of seriousness and zeal, the two princess seemed to misinterpret this to have romantic connotations. They commented "A knight's oath", "So dreamy", which made Raynesia's head hurt.

"Sir Krusty, please don't mind me and protect the beautiful flowers in the courtyard, alright?"

Raynesia tried her best to look at Krusty with virtuous eyes as she said this. It meant 'isn't it time to find some other place of refuge?'

"No, the peaceful air around the princess is calming to my raging heart from my many battles, if the princess is fine with me, please let me stay with you during this meeting period in order to repay your kindness."

Krusty's words meant "For the whole meeting period, I will be using you as a shield, this is a great cooperation plan right?"

This interaction made the two princesses scream with joy and leave, the exhausted Raynesia leaned back on the couch.

Krusty beside her gave a feeling of peace and quiet.

In the people's eyes, this was a scene of a princess who was unable to bear the din of the party and her loyal knight protecting her silently.

Part 4

"Huff...huff...."

Tohya panted loudly as he emptied his water bottle in one gulp.

Serara was beside him and asked: "Are you okay?"

Minori's group was in a tomb after taking the route on the right in 'Ragranda Forest'. There were countless skeleton bones scattered all over.

They broke through the battle in the tunnel just now. Using this tomb as a choke point to handle the reinforcements, they managed to survive in the chaotic battle.

The party showed signs of exhaustion.

In this alternate world, their physical abilities and stamina were strengthened a lot. A middle-school girl could spend the whole day climbing mountains and exploring dungeons was the best evidence.

But the mental fatigue was not so easy.

The long continuous battles drained their concentration.

The more chaotic the fight, the more mentally tired they became. Minori was also troubled by her sharp headache for a while now.

(Now that I think of it, I haven't drank anything since the morning...)

Minori didn't feel thirsty, but she still took a sip from her water canteen. If she was dehydrated, it would affect her ability to think, something she could not afford to lose.

(The condition is very bad...)

Minori looked at her party members.

Tohya sat on the floor with his sword in his arms, and his breathing was recovering slowly. The battle just now was hard, and he lost a lot of blood, even losing 30% of his HP at one instance, and was suffering from various debuffs that they had no time to clear away, it must be a painful experience.

But the exhausted Tohya was still sitting near the entrance on stand-by, so he could react immediately and be the enemies' first target. Minori thought this was due to Tohya's determination and strong character.

Serara was still breathing hard, but she was still arranging the items in her bag. Minori thinks she was checking the position of the potions to handle the needs of the next battle.

Minori and Serara were healers, but they were still relying on potions. This might sound strange, but skills for dispelling debuffs had a recast time, Minori's 'Notice of Exorcism' had a recast time of 20 seconds. In other words, if she insisted on only using 'Notice of Exorcism', she could only clear one debuff every 20 seconds.

If the whole party was poisoned, by the time she could get to the last person, 80 seconds would have passed. Serara was probably doing this to fight for time, so she would cure her own debuffs with potions.

(Yeah, this is great, I will prepare next time as well.)

Minori added to her mental note.

But this also meant that Serara who was a higher level healer than her was unable to handle the situation effectively, using potions was just a drop in the bucket.

Rundelhous shut his eyes tightly.

Minori was familiar with this position, he should be opening the game menu and checking his remaining MP.

After the continuous battles, Minori only had about a quarter of her MP left. They were now resting, so their MP was regenerating at a normal pace, they could probably regain 70-80% in 10 minutes, enough to continue fighting.

But Rundelhous had been casting spells rapidly, much more than Minori. If Minori's estimate of her party-mate's MP was correct, Rundelhous had exhausted all of his MP in the previous battle. Maybe to him, waiting and recovering was also a way of working hard to destroy the enemy in the next fight.

For the past 2 days, Minori had heard Rundelhous saying to himself "Why..." He probably meant "Why is this so hard", "Why can't we win" and also "Why am I so weak".

These words probably came about because of his conceited nature.

Minori understood, because she was the same.

('Why'... I can understand that feeling, we are holding each other back, even things we can do alone are done sloppily, something... is developing in a bad way.)

If she said these words, and endured them...

Minori didn't think of Rundelhous as a carefree kid, he was taking his duty of exterminating the enemy seriously. In fact, he refused to compromise on this.

(Rundelhous-san should be working hard in his own way... It might be hard to understand, but he is giving his all.)

Isuzu was quiet.

Minori was a bit worried about her, Isuzu was usually very cheerful and talkative. She was very sensitive to the atmosphere around her, unable to be playful in this situation. Minori was worried that she might not be able to endure this mentally.

(Regarding this... I am the same...)

Minori understood that something was wrong somewhere, which made the situation bad, she also understood that she was the one who could grasp the situation the best.

This is one of the dangers Shiroe mentioned repeatedly.

(But... I think...)

Minori shut her lips tight, now was a critical situation, it fit several examples Shiroe warned about.

"Why are we so weak..."

Rundelhous who had calmed his breathing said.

His voice was not loud, but it reverberated within the walls of the tomb.

"..."

Minori bit her lower lip, Isuzu was unable to raise her head.

"I am level 24, the enemies are between level 17-21, so why are our battles so desperate? Isn't this weird?"

(This...)

Minori thought this was because he had not performed to his full potential, or he was being held back from performing to his potential.

...Undead types did not have much intelligence. High-level undead monsters aside, they had only encountered skeleton and zombie types of undead monsters, they were not self-aware or did not possess tactical intellect.

In the end, it was Minori's group who was suppressing their own potential.

But she was unable to say it.

Because she was level 21, the lowest in the party and a burden to her party members. On top of that, the highest level here was her brother Tohya at level 29.

If Minori said these words, it would look like she who was the weakest was finding an excuse. If it was Tohya, it would look like he was defending his sister.

Even though they understood they were not performing at their best, they did not know how to overcome this problem.

"..."

"So... We can only keep practicing..."

Rundelhous seemed to not believe his own words, it was the same for the others.

Part 5

The sound of water flowing could be heard clearly in the dark courtyard.

The fountain situated in the center of the courtyard continued to operate late into the night, the water flowed through the beautiful sculpture and fell from a predetermined height, making ripples at the bottom.

The designer of 'Ancient Palace of Eternal Ice' seemed to have made ample preparation to tackle the heat in the summer. This palace was supported by permafrost pillars 15 meters into the sky, so there was less humidity from the ground, and the temperature was lower.

Using unknown technology, fresh water was supplied to similar waterways all over the palace, the water flowed from high to low and the cycle was repeated.

Even though it was August, the palace night air was still comfortably cool.

In the center of this cool courtyard, a young girl was practicing moves silently. The movements were not violent, those who were trained could tell she had put in effort into the practice of martial arts.



Every time she moved, her long black hair would sway with the wind. Her petite body was covered by dark and low profile clothes, but her slim body still had very alluring curves.

She was the young female assassin from Log Horizon, Akatsuki.

(Right step, left slide, pause...left step, right side step, half a turn... pause.)

The young girl was practicing strange movements.

In karate or ancient martial arts, the focus was not only the steps, but also the upper body flow, all martial arts seemed to follow this concept. But the young girl was putting her hands horizontally in front of her chest, she seemed to be concentrating on practicing the steps.

At first glance, this was similar to a certain Chinese martial arts, not lowering the center of gravity, moving lightly with the knees and ankles. It had a hint of Japanese Kendo, it was a weird movement.

(Left step, right side step, half a turn... another turn... left side step, change position, right step, 2 steps...)

Akatsuki focused on practicing the steps repeatedly.

Repeating so much that she seemed to have lost track of time, the entire movement merged with her body like blood flowing in her veins, Akatsuki incidentally raised her gaze and saw Shiroe.

"My lord?"

"Akatsuki, you are not sleeping?"

"You... When did you....?"

"Eh... Just now."

Shiroe approached with a troubled expression, handing the glass in his hand to Akatsuki. He should be lying about 'Just now', how would he explain why he was holding 2 glasses?

When did he start watching? Akatsuki found it hard to hide her embarrassment, but she worked to act casual and took the cup.

"My thanks."

The cup she received was filled with garnet tea. Even though the taste was simple, the coldness was just right, her body that just finished exercising welcomed it.

Shiroe sat on the limestone bench with decorative carvings near the fountain. There was space for at least 3 people beside him. But Akatsuki did not sit down, not because of the lack of space, but because of the lack of courage.

Akatsuki stood in front of Shiroe and drank her tea casually. Even though it could be described as standing in front of him, she avoided standing right in front, at an angle of 60 degrees to the side.

(A shinobi needs to be like this.)

She explained to herself, but the other reason was that their eyes would meet if she stood directly in front of him.

Akatsuki wanted to avoid that.

Even for a shinobi, she did not need to be so humble. But she didn't know if it was respect or embarrassment, if Akatsuki were to face Shiroe directly, she would have a cowardly emotion in her heart.

"..."

But Shiroe did not expect Akatsuki to have such thoughts. He showed a faraway and troubled expression, which seemed so mature to her.

This young man Shiroe's eyes had pupils that were slightly smaller than usual, he had a habit of frowning when he was looking at something (and he looked at the details very closely), giving an impression of aloofness. As he wore mischievous round-frame glasses, the first impression would be they were being conned by him. But after being around him for a while, they would be amazed by his deep thoughts and wide imagination.

It was hard for others to understand Shiroe's train of thought, but there were things only Akatsuki knew.

Living like family together in the guild house, she was able to see different sides of him, just like the him that was sitting on this bench, even Akatsuki who was short would also notice.

Yes, for instance Shiroe's hair whorl went in a clockwise direction.

Akatsuki thought this was very cute.

A bunch of hair behind his head would twirl like a rat's tail like he had just woken up, it was very cute.

That bunch of hair was sticking up now, tempting Akatsuki to touch it gently with her fingers. Akatsuki and Shiroe were both in university in the real world, they were at an age where they could not touch each other casually without concern, so she held back her desires.

(But my lord's clockwise hair whorl is very cute.)

Akatsuki thought in her heart.

"So how do you feel about it, Akatsuki?"

"About what?"

"...For example, what are the reactions of the people in the palace?"

Shiroe was very vague, probably because he was unable to explain it clearly himself, Akatsuki decided to report what she felt about the situation.

"You can describe it as curiosity, half of it is kindness, the other half is hostility."

"Is that so..."

"But, I feel it is good that even though there is hostility, there is no malice."

"?"

Hostility referred to their mentality, not only used on enemies, but also on potential enemies and competitors. Malice meant the will to harm your enemies.

After listening to the explanation, Shiroe expressed: "Since that is the case, I think they have no concrete plan as of now."

"Even if it is hostility, it should probably be jealousy and admiration."

"You are right... it could also be the lack of trust."

Shiroe nodded his head agreeing with Akatsuki's view. Shiroe should be using his own ways to observe the surroundings, searching for the

meaning in the words and gaze of the crowds. He asked Akatsuki's opinion to compare answers, or to confirm his thoughts.

Akatsuki's group was always the center of attention wherever they went.

Henrietta and Shiroe's dance on the first day made them the topic of the day, Shiroe and Henrietta changed partners and danced for 5 music pieces. They received many dancing invites from the noble ladies and gentlemen, akin to a challenge in the social world of the 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal'.

During the dance party, apart from Shiroe and Henrietta, Krusty and Michitaka also socialized with many of the nobles.

The cute and petite Akatsuki was viewed with curiosity in the beginning.

From their common sense, anyone in this hall was either a noble or their servant. They were unable to decide which role Akatsuki belonged to.

But considering the fact that Henrietta danced with Shiroe, and Akatsuki's frilly dress, they decided not to see her as a servant, but as the family of a noble clan.

Once that was clear, a lot of invites poured in.

Sons of noblemen or knights repeatedly approached Akatsuki, offering drinks and dances. Akatsuki didn't mind their doing that, but she couldn't tolerate being treated like a child.

Akatsuki was already an adult.

Why was everyone pampering her like a grade-schooler? In that hall, only the daughters of nobles saw Akatsuki as an equal, but they were obviously in their low-teens.

(Why must I be treated as an equal by a child?)

Akatsuki was furious as she recalled this, there seemed to be a fire burning in her belly.

In the real world, this treatment was normal.

She would be stopped at the bar, ticket-counter staff would pat her head and tell her to get the children tickets, the clothes that fit her best were in the children category. She had enough of this. And this was the reason

she role-played as a tall silent man in Elder Tales, but even that was screwed up by the Catastrophe.

She almost drew her kunai at the dance party out of anger, but she restrained herself and escaped. She was tired of dealing with other people, and used 'invisibility' and 'silent move' to leave the hall.

She had been walking around the whole palace using these skills since that day.

Hiding behind drapes or curtains, she eavesdropped on the conversations of the nobles. She could not approach too openly. Akatsuki's keen senses told her there were other hidden People of the Land who were also spying on the nobles. If you did not prepare adequately in advance, the one who noticed first had the advantage over the ones who were hidden for this type of secret operations.

This was just honor among thieves, a 'if you don't mess around, we can just ignore each other' situation. The spirit of not interfering with each other among spies.

Even through such a casual observation, it was easy to infer that the people sent to spy in Akiba were a lot more than expected. They were very interested and focused on Adventurers and the Round Table Council.

Deducing even further, this also confirmed the People of the Land knew about the Catastrophe, and thought of this as the first step of the revolution that would impact the world.

"To harbor hostility, is it because of the difference in battle prowess?"

"That seems to be it."

Adventurers were powerful in combat, Akiba's 15000 Adventurers, about half of them were level 90. Even if you lowered the average level to 70, that would also mean Akiba had 15000 level 70 Adventurers.

This fighting force was far above what the nobles could command.

One of the nobles leaked this information: "There are 15 level 30 knights in my army, the others are guards and militias, about a hundred, other than this, the rest are mercenaries." If this was true, they could suppress this territory with just 30 Adventurers.

"I see, I think they did not make up these numbers, the weaker lords in the northeast should be about this level."

"Is that so?"

Shiroe confirmed Akatsuki's doubt. He seemed to have made progress in his own investigation.

"Because their forces are at this level, that's why they are not able to stop the evil ways of ruffian Adventurers like Brigandia."

"You are right."

Akiba and the Round Table Council had no intention to fight, they wanted to cooperate with the People of the Land instead, and coexist with them in this world.

Of course, if they had to fight the People of the Land to return to their old world, it would be a different matter. But going to war with the People of the Land had no benefit for the players.

But if they used this reason on the People of the Land blindly, that would be dangerous.

Firstly, Akatsuki and the Adventurers saw this world differently from the People of the Land. Their nobles governed the land and lived off taxes. Adventurers were an unknown factor, and their actions might be a pain to the nobles.

And the other major problem was just as Shiroe said, battle prowess.

For example, if there was a man with a machine gun in the room you lived in, how would you feel? Living in this room must be very stressful, the question was not whether the man with the gun could be trusted, it didn't matter if his character was good or if his morale was solid. It was even worse if that man was a stranger, it was a worry to be near a man with a machine gun.

"And they have not accurately judged the full battle powers available of each other."

Shiroe went deeper.

Even if the People of the Land knew Adventurers were strong, they wouldn't know the extent of their strength. If you used the previous example, your roommate would be holding a certain weapon, you did not know if it was a chainsaw or a machine gun.

Maybe it was just a fruit knife or chopsticks, such inconsequential weapons. But the worst case could be grenades or antitank missiles, which would blow the whole room to pieces.

The nobles were not sure what weapons they had, so they were unable to judge if they should defeat them by surprise or ambushes or to strive for peace no matter the cost or humiliation.

"Should we threaten them with war?"

"That will be a bad choice, spreading feelings of fear too much is useless. I should say that even if there are pros, the cons are not worth the efforts."

"I see..."

Shiroe rejected Akatsuki's proposal immediately.

But Akatsuki wouldn't be depressed because of that. Shiroe was someone Akatsuki recognized as her lord, Akatsuki hoped he would excel in the tactical battlefield, and progress to a point so far that she could never catch up. Akatsuki was okay with supporting Shiroe with her special skills. Just doing that would leave her content.

"Hmmm...?"

Just doing that would leave her content.

Just doing that would definitely make her content.

Akatsuki felt something was not right, something was making her uncomfortable, but she didn't know why. And this was a small feeling of discomfort, she would be fine ignoring it.

(It should be fine.)

And it was getting late at night.

If she wanted to stay up for the night, it might affect her ability in fighting the intelligence battle. Akatsuki was still okay for now, but Shiroe's duty was a strategist.

Akatsuki was about to advise Shiroe to go to bed when she felt a tremble of magic in the surroundings.

Shiroe felt it at the same moment.

He sprang up from his seat, his hand holding his wand that appeared out of nowhere.

Akatsuki drew her kodachi and took up a stance. A skinny man appeared in front of her and Shiroe.

Wearing a robe like a scholar, his forehead covered by a purple crystal accessory, his skin seemed to be covering just the bare minimum of muscles in a human body. If it was only that, it would be a sign of misfortune. But there seemed to be a sense of humor in the man's expression, giving off an unspeakable charm, a feeling of adoration.

The man lowered his hand as a greeting and said,

"You must be Shiroe-sama of Log Horizon, I am Ri Gan, a sage of 'Mirror Lake', please take care of me... I came here tonight to discuss some things with Shiroe-sama."

CHAPTER.



WORLD FRACTION

[森 羅 變 転]

► NAME: RE-GUN

► LEVEL: 28

► RACE: ELF

► CLASS: MAGIC SCHOLAR

► HP: 1624

► MP: 2721

► ITEM 1:
[WELL WORN ROBE]

A WELL USED ROBE, ALTHOUGH RE-GUN HAVE SPARE ROBES, HE THINKS CHANGING ROBES IS A BOTHER. HE DOESN'T MEET OTHER PEOPLE MUCH, SO RE-GUN DON'T FEEL ANY INCONVENIENCE.



► ITEM 2:
[ALMANAC]

RECORDING OF RESEARCHES DONE BY ALL PREVIOUS SAGES OF MIRROR LAKE. IT IS WRITTEN IN CYpher SO ONLY A SAGE OF THE MIRROR LAKE CAN UNDERSTAND IT. SOME OF THE CONTENTS WAS PURGED BY RE-GUN'S PREDECESSOR, AND THESE RECORDS HAS BEEN LOST EVER SINCE.



► ITEM 3:
[FIREFLY CANDELABRUM]

A CONVENIENT LIGHT SOURCE, THE BRIGHTNESS CAN BE ADJUSTED TO SUIT THE USER'S PREFERENCE. A COMMON ITEM MADE BY ADVENTURERS WITH PRODUCTION SUBCLASS, BUT IS NOT TOO POPULAR AMONG THE PEOPLE OF THE LAND.



<table width=60%><tr><td width=25%; valign="top">

Name: Ri Gan

Level: 28

Race: Elf

Class: Magic Scholar

HP: 1624

MP: 2721<td>Equipment

Well Worn Robe
 A well used robe, although Ri Gan has spare robes, he thinks changing robes is a bother. He doesn't meet other people much, so Ri Gan doesn't feel any inconvenience.

Almanac
 Recording of researches done by all previous Sages of Mirror Lake. It is written in cypher so only a Sage of Mirror Lake can understand it. Some of the contents were purged by Ri Gan's predecessor, and these record has been lost ever since.

Firefly Candleabrum
 A convenient light source, the brightness can be adjusted to suit user's preference. A common item made by the Adventurers with production subclass, but is not too popular among People of the Land.

Chapter 4: World Fraction

Part 1

"Gyaapyi~!?"

The youth rose to the sky and spun beautifully, leaving a cloud of dust behind him. That youth spun 2-3 times in the air before swiftly falling into the ocean head-first.

"Oooh...Oooh...! Wasn't that showy!"

Maryele was laughing loudly as she watched the scene while relaxing under the parasol.

This was the 'Meinion Beach'.

One of the most beautiful beaches in the Sand Leaf peninsula with its sparkling white sand. It was only a 30 minutes round-trip by horse from the school campus where Maryele and the others were staying at, a convenient place.

Maryele took an ice-cold soda from the cooler that doubled as a table beside her. She had taken off her singlet, revealing her bright bikini, an outfit ideal for vacations.

Her equipment included a parasol, a deck chair, and a cushion, she was totally prepared for the beach.

(Ahhh, this is it, this is it! This is paradise, I am so fortunate...)

Maryele had a smile worthy of praise but right now her smile was 10 times more enchanting than normal, her angelic smile could melt anyone's heart.

Even though there was no sunscreen, their bodies were much stronger in this world. They'd be able to manage somehow even if they got a sunburn. The swimsuit also took quite a bit of effort to secure.

In Elder Tales, a costume was equivalent to your equipment. Elder Tales was mainly a battle RPG, equipment basically meant armor or weapons, and it did not include undergarments.

Of course, if you removed all your equipment, your avatar would display you with underwear. But this was a function to avoid displaying sensitive

parts, a safety function in the game, akin to parental control, so there would only be dull and normal undergarments.

They could be seen on the character profile as well, but it didn't actually exist. But this function didn't work anymore, if you stripped off your clothes you would be naked, both your profile picture and yourself would be in the nude.

But underwear was very important, and the Japanese had always lived in a civilized world, they could not endure life without panties.

If you made underwear you could wear it, this was already a known fact. But undergarments required a very high tailor level to sew. The citizens had almost given up hope in acquiring them, but they caught a glimpse of light.

That light came from swimsuits.

With its smooth graphics as one of its selling points, there were many equipments for you to dress your avatar up in Elder Tales. This included the special item, swimsuit. Most swimwear were made from rare recipes, or given out for participating in special events.

Swimsuits were obviously different from underwear.

Like sweat absorption and friction from long hours of wear, they had many differences. But there were ways to overcome these differences after the Catastrophe, so the panties crisis was tided over by the excellent tailors.

After the Round Table Council announced the new method of producing items, the tailors started to make cotton and silk undergarments.

There was definitely high demand for them, and panties were a popular product for the tailors. Stuck with the mindset of the old world, Maryele also wanted several sets of undergarments to change periodically, so panties were one of the most profitable products for the tailors in Akiba.

Hooks, laces, and elastic bands could be acquired easily by using the game menu to create clothes and disassemble them. This ingenuity and attention to detail was their technique in making quality products. Since it was made by hand, their price was similar to a mid-level magic item, 300 gold, with no signs of dropping.

Swimsuits made through known recipes were very simple, so they were relatively cheap since they were made from normal ingredients. But swimsuits with flashy designs were quite expensive. Maryele was an experienced player who liked swimsuits, so she had a few pairs. The one she was wearing was taken from the storage room after not being used for years.

Maryele's swimwear was a praiseworthy design from the beaches of the old world, a bikini. The bikini itself was not small, but Maryele's criminal-level body and the high-cut of the bikini made her very sexy.

Maryele was conscious of that, so she put on a cotton hoodie.

(Anyway, with so many people watching...it will be pretty embarrassing if they see this...)

Maryele thought that she would be fine with the hoodie. But the fact was the vague form of the bikini under the hoodie made the others even more uncomfortable, as they didn't know where they should put their gaze. But she was not aware of this, Maryele was enjoying her vacation on her deck chair with a big smile, she was peaceful and at ease.

"Maryele-san, Maryele-san!"

The youth who jumped just now ran to her.

The youth was holding a spear-like weapon with sharp edges on either side, he should be a samurai. He was wearing leather armor under the hot sun, but he was totally wet after falling into the sea, just like a dog after a bath.

"Heal me please!"

The youth was bleeding profusely from his head.

"No problem."

Maryele nodded energetically, sat upright and cast 'Healing Light'. A six-pointed white star appeared at her fingertip, and the youth's HP was refilled after absorbing its light.

"This is great, I'm cured!"

The youth felt his wound, the bleeding had been healed. 'Healing Light' was a low-level spell with a short cast time and weak effects. It was normally used to bridge the gap while waiting for the high-level spells to cool down. But for low-level players, this was a powerful spell that could completely recover their HP.

"Thank you!"

"Anytime, anytime."

Maryele smiled.

"Don't mention it, go for another one! Get some more crabs! I suggest you ambush them from the side, remember to watch out for the restriction of your skills as well."

"Okay, understood!"

The youth ran off full of energy down the beach.

At the far end of Maryele's view of the beach, the youth discovered an Ascot Crab making its way onto the beach and made a detour. The crab was about a meter in length, if it spread its claws out it should be about 2 meters, a real giant crab.

He then charged the crab with his spear and struck at the side of its belly in an attempt to flip the crab over. He seemed successful this time.

There were 5-6 such beginners around Maryele, they were Adventurers with the lowest levels in this summer training camp.

Maryele was leading these beginners at this beach.

During the summer, there were countless Ascot Crabs, nicknamed 'Apricot', landing on the 'Meinon' shore line. If left alone, they would move further inland and endanger the livestock and the farms, so the People of the Land despised them.

But these monsters were not much of a threat, levels ranged from 4-8 suitable for beginners to grind.

Spending the whole day grinding like this should grant them plenty of EXP. If they were injured badly, they could seek treatment from Maryele.

They would take a break when they exhausted their MP.

With a personal medic on stand-by, they could have a tight training session.

Maryele's grand vacation plan was a big success.

"Hahhhh!"

"Die! Die, die! Just die!"

"Accept your fate!"

Maryele lay down on her deck chair as she listened to the battle cries of the beginners, the ice-cold soda in the glass cooling the summer heat.

This was just like heaven.

She couldn't help but smile.

Many of the beginners here wanted to be in the production line. This was the 3rd month since the Catastrophe, but they were willing to stay at this low-level because they abhorred fighting.

This was not a problem as players focusing on production were necessary to support battle guilds who went out to farm.

But in this alternate world, being a pure production player was very risky. If they had no battle power, they couldn't protect themselves in a crisis. And a high player level was beneficial to production as well, some simple ingredients could be obtained faster if they went by themselves.

This point probably played a big part in convincing them.

Or maybe the beginners were aware of that, but the production guilds did not have a comprehensive beginner support program for them, so they had given up. The beginners gathered at this beach were passionately grinding by engaging the crabs repeatedly.

To make it clear, every time they had a setback and were about to give up, Maryele would heal their wounds with her sunflower-like smile. So even if they wanted to retreat, they couldn't do it, the pride of boys was such a pathetic thing.

As for the girls, they were influenced by the furious fighting atmosphere of the boys and held the thought 'can't be helped, I will also train a bit more...'

Only Maryele was not aware of this reason.

(Everyone is working so hard... Wah, the weather is so nice.)

The sleepy Maryele continued to enjoy her vacation.

The mid-level camp leaders sent by 'Keele' and 'West Wind Brigade' were patrolling the beach as instructors and lifeguards. Maryele was standing by as the supervisor (she was just enjoying her vacation), and healed the wounds of the occasional casualty.

Maryele who was bored out of her mind was turning in her chair again.

The air was dry, even if it was hot it didn't feel uncomfortable.

When she saw a line of white bubbles on the surface of the ocean by chance, she waved over to Shouryuu who was nearby.

"Shouryuu...look, what is that?"

Maryele pointed to the white line in the sea.

"Eh, what is that...bubbles? The trail of a boat? Hmm..."

But the discussion ended like that.

The white line dissipated after a while, and nothing of interest happened after. The group battled crabs until the sun set, leaving with plenty of crab meats and shells.

Production subclass training began at the school campus in the evening, Maryele and the rest had long forgotten about the mysterious white line.

Part 2

Isuzu entered the 3rd day of their challenge of Ragranda Forest.

Their daily challenges lasted less than 3 hours.

The process depended on their stamina, so they were unable to stay in the dungeon for long.

It didn't mean it was better if you stayed in the dungeon longer, but it was obviously a problem if the duration was so short. They only managed 4-5 battles for each trip.

They could only keep practicing.

Rundelhous explained it this way, but there was no significant gain in EXP with only 4-5 battles. Each fight evolved into a battle of attrition, and they ended the trip after exhausting their MP and mental strength with nothing much to show for it. This story kept repeating itself.

Isuzu was not wearing armor, she had changed into casual clothes.

Because it was tiring to return to camp wearing heavy equipment.

The higher level party spent about 6 hours in the dungeon every day, so the low level party who retreated around noontime had nothing much to do.

They could recover their HP and MP after resting for an hour.

And they could challenge the dungeon again in the afternoon to earn some EXP, but they were stopped by Nyanta and Naotsugu. They did not know the reason, but the party relented when they heard their instructors' harsh warning.

And so, Isuzu's party could only do menial tasks like picking firewood or drawing water from the ponds, or just kill some time in the woods.

From the angle of the sun, it should be about 3pm.

Isuzu was on her way to a pond nearby.

It was not a big pond, but because there was fresh water flowing in, the pond was cool and clear, the water for the group was all drawn from here. It might not be suitable for drinking so no one had tried that, but Isuzu thought it should be fine.

There were no showers in the hills.

No one actually suggested it, but Isuzu's group decided to take turns to shower in the pond.

"...Huff!...Ha!"

The distant sound of breathing came from deep in the forest.

(Who is it?)

Isuzu peeked in the direction of the sound.

The one training vigorously in the forest was Rundelhous. He was wearing a light purple costume similar to the uniform of a noble's boarding school, with a cloak of a mage on top, and was sweating profusely.

He must have been exercising for quite some time. If the fluid that was dyeing the ground in darker shades was sweat, he might have been training all this while after leaving the dungeon.

Rundelhous extended his left hand forward. He created a big fireball, compressing it to the limit to the size of a fist. This process required immense concentration, Rundelhous who was always very concerned with his image was sweating like a pig and clenching his teeth.

After shooting the ball, a large ball of mist formed in his hand, which he compressed into an ice ball and shot out like he did before. This attack extinguished the fireball he shot out earlier.

The magic that had been changed into ice and fire clashed fiercely in the forest, producing lots of steam. Rundelhous did not let down his guard and kept moving around, maneuvering himself from time to time to avoid the scalding water.

Incorporating defensive moves into his attacks, he seemed to be doing a battle simulation.

Isuzu noticed 2 lines on either side of Rundelhous, she didn't understand the meaning behind them. Only after watching Rundelhous for a few minutes did she realize what they represented.

(...The walls of the dungeon.)

The 2 lines on the ground represented the tunnel in the dungeon, Rundelhous was fighting invisible skeletons that were coming at him from the front.

He kept moving around all over the place, but he did not cross the line, because they were walls.

And he had been moving for quite a while now.

It seemed like a long time, but after about 5 minutes, Rundelhous fell on his knees and breathed out loud. He maintained this position like he was puking, giving out an embarrassingly loud panting sound.

"Are you okay...?"

Isuzu who had been watching from behind the trees asked hesitantly.

He reminded her of a classmate with asthma who displayed similar symptoms

But Rundelhous seemed genuinely surprised by her voice, jumping up like a spring and facing Isuzu.

"Hi Miss Isuzu... what... what are you doing here?"

Rundelhous smiled like a prince and flipped up his fringe.

But his fringe was full of sweat, so they were stuck on his forehead.

"Don't push yourself alright?"

Isuzu said while holding back a laugh, but she failed to calm Rundelhous, who worked in a panic to conceal his sorry state.

"You... You think I am pushing myself? No...there is no such thing, I am only here for an afternoon stroll and to listen to the birds sing on the invitation of the fairies..."

Rundelhous' face was turning purple as he went on.

(He was just gasping for air and still wants to talk like a prince, no wonder he is turning purple...)

Isuzu thought, but Rundelhous kept up his princely smile even with his purple face. Isuzu felt a sense of sympathy, so she averted her gaze and turned her back to him.

"I...I see."

An intense breathing sound came from her back as Isuzu spoke.

A young couple alone in the woods with the heavy breathing sound of a man, you could describe it as a pervert sighting. But no matter how

frivolous Rundelhous was, Isuzu still wanted to commend him for his samurai spirit.

(Eh... I am weird in some ways.)

Isuzu and Rundelhous were about the same level, and he looked to be in his early twenties, shouldn't be any younger than Isuzu. Rundelhous was a boy and not frail at all.

But there was a big gap between their battle prowess, Isuzu was a support class, Rundelhous specialized in damaging attacks. His battle prowess should be several times better than hers.

But ignoring battle powers or conditions, Isuzu felt she was superior than Rundelhous in a totally different category. She didn't understand her own feelings.

"Miss Isuzu...what are you doing in a place like this?"

"I am going to shower...Oh right, Rundelhous-san, let's go together."

Isuzu did not ask: "Do you want to go?" The normal her wouldn't talk like this, but right now she was not being polite to Rundelhous at all.

"Shower? I have no interest in peeking at ladies bathing, don't look down on me!"

"No one said anything about showering together or letting you peek."

Isuzu kept her back to Rundelhous and retorted in a half-joking, half-angry manner. Rundelhous behind her choked and coughed, which made her happy.

"It's not nice to let a lady wander alone in the forest, right?"

Isuzu blushed a little, calling herself a lady was a bit embarrassing. It felt a bit too much, but she couldn't take back what she said.

"You are right, yeah, I will just be an escort."

Rundelhous' voice started to recover.

"Then allow me to escort you, the spring nearby? Which way?"

Isuzu turned around.

The Rundelhous before her said: "Please lead the way." She almost lost her composure looking at his expression, he was sweaty but was still charming, looking at him like this made him look really handsome. He could win against any shoujo manga's main character in the real world.

(But I don't feel excessive pressure from this... Is this also the effect of the alternate world?)

"Rundelhous-san, it is this way."

Isuzu tilted her head slightly, and as she started on the trail leading to the pond, the young man said to her:

"Miss Isuzu, please just call me Rudy, that's how my parents address me."

Isuzu listened to this with a tingling in her heart.

Part 3

Shiroe and Akatsuki were brought to the depths of the 'Ancient Palace of Eternal Ice', they did not know which zone they were in.

In the depths of the palace, it was cold despite it being summer, the cold was between 'cool' and 'chilly'. At the end of the tunnel was a sculpted giant metal door.

"This way, this is my abode, please come in."

Ri Gan who claimed to be a sage opened the door and invited the 2 of them in. There were several thousand books in the library. You could tell it was a library from the gigantic round table, the tall ceilings and the room that extended in a straight line into the depths like a tunnel.

There were mountains of books surrounding them.

On either side of the tunnel wall were shelves twice the height of Shiroe. They were filled to the brim with delicacies known as books. The journals and scrolls spilled onto the floor, forming mini-avalanches.



This sight continued on deep into the darkness.

Ri Gan searched around the room as he said 'Hmm, this is weird' 'Where did it go?' Shiroe and Akatsuki occupied a couch after clearing the books that were on it.

"Eh, I apologize, I have misplaced the beverages I prepared in advance."

Ri Gan was sorry about that, but Shiroe shook his head and replied: "It's alright," taking a few glasses and a bottle of black rose tea from his bag.

This tea had became a popular beverage among the masses, it was thicker than brewed tea but was not as bitter, and you could add honey or sugar to it to fit your preferences. The one Shiroe made had been cooled in the spring wells and sweetened with syrup.

Shiroe poured cups for himself, Ri Gan, and Akatsuki. Ri Gan gave an expression of joy with just a sip. He might be short and frail, but he had a charming aura, a man of mystery.

From his appearance, he seemed about Shiroe's age.

"My gratitude, I have always been poor in searching for things... Is this Dazanegg's Magic Bag?"

"That's right, I had someone make this for me."

Shiroe nodded and replied bluntly.

"I have researched this bag before...for the process of crystallizing the magic circuits, you would need purple flame crystals and wyvern leather right?"

"Yes, I gathered these materials before they could work on this."

Shiroe was impressed, this was a level 45 quest 'Getting a Magical Backpack'. The sage Ri Gan had a good grasp on the contents of the quest, much more knowledgeable than normal People of the Land.

"Please excuse my impudence, let me introduce myself again, I am Ri Gan. I claimed to be a mage and use magic, but technically I am a magic scholar."

"Magic scholar?"

"Yes, someone who researches magic. I am also a lecturer for normal magical studies, but I have been focusing on doing research."

"Researching here?"

"Yes, I have lived in the 'Ancient Palace of Eternal Ice' for over 30 years, this was originally the laboratory of my master. But after he passed on a few years ago, I inherited his work and continued to research day and night, do forgive my poor dress sense."

"...Mirror Lake... you are the Sage of Mirror Lake?"

Shiroe remembered Ri Gan's first introduction and understood the significance of this title.

Sage of Mirror Lake.

When Elder Tales was just a game, this was a title that was related to several quests, rumors, and books. For instance, the crucial item 'Key of Eternal Darkness' for the major raid '9 Prisons of Heroes' was said to be made by the Sage of Mirror Lake.

But this was just a setting in the game which Shiroe thought was meant to add more background to the story, so he did not give it much thought.

"I guess I am. But I still can't refer to myself with the title, unable to drop the feeling of being a student. When others mention this title, I always feel that they are referring to my master."

"So the Sage of Mirror Lake is a hereditary title?"

"It is indeed, please call me Ri Gan."

With his humble demeanor, the Sage of Mirror Lake did not have the air of one with such a grand title.

The silence flowed between them.

Shiroe drank his black rose tea and his brain turned at high speed. Attending the meeting of 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal' was due to their invitation, but it was also a step in gathering intelligence of the world. Attending this meeting provided the chance to know and interact with the leaders of the world, widening their information network, much more in depth than what you could get poking around in the streets.

But this was a big catch.

It had been 3 months since the Catastrophe.

All kinds of knowledge about the world was gathered slowly by Shiroe's group. At least the minimum knowledge to live their daily lives normally was complete. The adventurers in Akiba were successful in getting food, clothes, and shelter.

But information like this made Shiroe think that "there is so much more to learn."

There would be no problem if it was just Shiroe alone.

Or if there were only a few members living together, all problems could be solved. No matter what the People of the Land thought or what was the truth of this world, Shiroe and the others were able to survive in this world with their abilities. They could go on journeys indefinitely, or build a base in the deep mountains, they could survive no matter what.

But Shiroe could not think of it this way. There were 15,000 Adventurers in Akiba and almost 30,000 in the whole server, if he could abandon them, he wouldn't have started the Round Table Council.

The 30,000 Adventurers could not ignore the People of the Land and live by themselves, they also needed a base of their own.

In this area under the Japanese server, the population was probably 1.5 million, the 15,000 Adventurers were too big in number, they would have a large impact on the world no matter what they did. In fact, the new production method already had a huge impact on the world.

Even if Nyanta did not discover this new method, someone would definitely discover it after a few months and the news would spread. Shiroe took advantage of everyone's confusion and depression after the Catastrophe and took the initiative to control the situation.

Shiroe did not feel responsible for the spread of the new production method, but he needed to understand the impact of this new knowledge. And there should be similar incidents in the future. No matter how they tried to conceal it, Adventurers were still an alien existence in this world. To achieve a good ending and divert them from the path of destruction, they would need deep and wide knowledge of the world. Shiroe's group lacked such knowledge.

(This conversation...might be more important than the meeting with the nobles.)

Ri Gan stared at Shiroe with interest and said:

"I claimed to be a magic scholar, but the school of magic covers a lot of areas and has many fields of studies. My research focuses on global-level magic."

"...Global level?"

Shiroe rubbed his chin as he listened to this foreign term.

"Yes, this is in accordance to the scale of the magic effects, magic can be categorized into action level, battle level, tactical level, strategic level, war level, national level, continental level, and global level. This is just one way of categorizing them, you can also group them by their features into energy control, changes in material form, conjuring types. Arranging them by spell levels is also commonly used."

Shiroe thought as he listened.

This was a rare way of thinking, if you categorized by the features of magic... for instance, Sorcerers controlled energy, summoners conjured creatures... Shiroe could understand, that was a simple way of doing it.

Shiroe also understood grouping them by spell levels, which was what spells could be learned at each specific player level, the way used by the officials in Elder Tales.

"To categorize by scale, you need to analyze the magic by its effects or understand its intent through observation. Action class is a magic that simulates a single action. For example swinging a sword to attack a monster, if you do this by magic, that is action class, hurting one or a group of monsters is the effect, which can be achieved by a single action. The magic used by mages are mostly action class, no matter how damaging the attack might be."

From this perspective, Shiroe's basic attack, 'Mind Bolt', was an action level magic. That was a magic bolt that hurt the enemy's mind, but the effect was equivalent to shooting an arrow. Even if there were damage or debuffs, they were just additional conditions.

"Battle level magic can decide the result of a single battle. If you cast it, you can determine the fate of your enemies and your allied party."

This was a deep way of categorizing magic. For example Shiroe's 'Astral Hypnos' seemed like an action level spell, but depending on the way it was used, it could push a group of enemies to the brink of defeat. Labeling it as battle level made sense in this situation.

"Tactical level magic can affect 2-3 battles at the same time, a legendary magic cast by a group of sorcerers belongs to this class."

Affecting multiple battles, meaning powerful buffing enchantments? Shiroe could only find one spell in his arsenal that fit this description.

"Strategic level is even larger in scale, the effect can last for days, a single spell can defeat a fortress, a tower, or a dungeon."

This was already beyond Shiroe's imagination.

It might make sense in a simulation game, but players role-played as Adventurers in Elder Tales, if the Adventurer had the power to destroy a dungeon by himself, there would be no need to work together since they had such overwhelming forces.

"Let's keep the rest of this short, war level can decide a war, national level can destroy an enemy nation, continental level can affect the whole continent with a single spell. As for global level..."

"It's a magic that can decides the existence or the fate of the world... correct?"

"That is correct."

Shiroe understood the concept.

It was still understandable if you treated it as academic research, but did such spells exist? No, in the world of Elder Tales, Shiroe was an enchanter himself, questioning the existence of magic was ridiculous, but the scale in this topic was too big, he was unable to relate to it.

"About that...Pardon me for asking, I can keep up with this categorization, but does such magic exist? Or is this just a theoretical category?"

Shiroe's question made Ri Gan smile charmingly and answer.

"It does exist, Searching through the archives and with my own observations, magic of this level happened 3 times, it is called World Fraction."

"...The Catastrophe right?"

Ri Gan's expression confirmed Shiroe's query instantly.

A magic of this scale could not be the work of one man.

It might be the work of a being higher than humans, but research had not shed any light on this.

War level, national level, continental level... Why was there a need to research magic that probably did not exist? The reason was because it actually did exist.

Maybe it could not be done by People of the Land or Adventurers, but if a being like a fire elemental caused a volcano to erupt, or an earth elemental made an earthquake...These might cause magical destruction of the national level.

As an experienced player familiar with Elder Tales, Shiroe thought of magic as just one of the skills of Adventurers, and could accept the existence of magic of grander scales from the background and the story setting.

The skinny researcher Ri Gan was looking into magic that was beyond that of a single caster, he was indeed a magic scholar, not just a mage. His goal was not to increase his prowess, but to investigate the mysteries of the world and understand how nature works.

"You named the incident that happened in May as The Catastrophe, the People of the Land refers to it simply as the Revolution or the May Incident, but I see it as the 3rd World Fraction. I have invited you to chat and find out more about the World Fraction from you. As a researcher, I want to know every detail."

Ri Gan's eyes shone with curiosity, and he appeared to be sincere.

(There is no point in hiding anything, we don't really know much ourselves, but...)

"You said 'the 3rd' right? You mentioned that there have been 2 other global level magic, can you tell us about the previous 2 World Fractions? We Adventurers don't have too much data on the Catastrophe, and I am willing to tell you, but I also wish to know more about the Catastrophe."

Part 4

Shiroe's words made Ri Gan who was reaching for his glass stop momentarily.

"I don't mind, but it could take a while, will you be fine with that?"

"..."

"Yes, sorry for troubling you."

Shiroe confirmed with Akatsuki who nodded beside him, and replied to Ri Gan. Akatsuki maintained a tense expression and listened carefully.

"Let me think, where should we start? As I said, I don't know everything about the World Fractions, you can even say I am totally ignorant about the subject. You can even treat this as something that happened in the past... But that won't be explaining, so let me start from what I do know... from the history of our world."

Shiroe adjusted himself in his seat and nodded in agreement.

Shiroe was happy that Ri Gan was explaining right from the beginning.

"About 350 years ago, the world was much more prosperous than it is now, even if it could not match the glory of the fallen ancient empire, the population was still 3-5 times more than it is right now. Using the continent as their base, people spread to the corners of the world."

"What do you mean by continent?"

"Ah, I mean the neighboring Eureddo continent."

The Eurasia continent... including China, the countries in the middle-east, Shiroe nodded in reply. This was without question the biggest continent in the world.

But he did not start with the ancient lore, which surprised Shiroe. According to the background story of Elder Tales, the ancient empire which advanced

civilization to its limits was ripped apart and reconstructed. The developers did not mention the dark age during the rebuilding of the world, so the players only thought of Elder Tales as the world right after the reconstruction.

But the buildings and roads from the ancient times deteriorated to this extent, which meant all sorts of things happened during this dark period of time. Shiroe kept thinking of it as a blank period of time where nothing happened, so this fact surprised him.

"The four races of Humans, Alvs, Elves and Dwarfs lived gloriously in the world, every country lived in peace and prosperity, the magical items you can find in dungeons today are remnants from this period of time. The 'Ancient Palace of Eternal Ice' we are in is an ancient magical structure, obviously different from that of the ancient lore, right? This is built by the Alv during that time, and they're also the inventors of magic, the pioneers in magic civilization. The various magical items they created are said to be able to decipher the mysteries of the world.

The Alv... The developers listed them as an extinct ancient race, Shiroe was a Half-Alv who inherited this ancient bloodline, but there was no history or story behind this in the game, he only knew they were powerful in magic, a race suitable to use magic items.

"The details have nothing to do with the main topic so I won't dwell too much on it, but this power became a source of disaster. The Alv have high intelligence and magical talents, but are weak in reproduction. Their population did not increase, and the country around the land was also small. A minority race like this monopolizing magical techniques infuriated the surrounding nations, and they destroyed the Alv kingdoms one by one... The Alv were pushed to extinction, and their glorious history ends here."

Since the Alv were extinct, something like this must have happened.

Shiroe had Alv blood in him, but this did not fan his nationalistic instincts, he just made a note that there was such a setting.

"But what about me?... There are quite a number of Half-Alv in this world, even though it is a small number."

"This is the sign of the end of the Alv. The people raided the Alv firstly for their magical knowledge and quality magical items, and following that... they were after the Alv themselves. The Alv became slaves in this world. Everywhere, including the human, elf, and dwarf kingdoms, they traded the Alv as slaves, they were violated and gave birth to children, which are the Half-Alv we know. But the genetic inheritance tends to skip generations, and appears with a low probability between human parents... Woah, I'm going off topic, that won't do. Anyway, the Alv kingdoms fell, but a major upheaval happened. Featured prominently in this upheaval are the six scrapped princesses of the Alv."

"Six scrapped princesses...?"

This was a foreign term. Ri Gan wrote on the table with his finger. Six meant there were six of them, scrapped meant they had fallen from grace, princesses meant females from a royal family.

"There are many theories behind the identity of the six scrapped princesses, the theory here is that they are different individuals with their own names and place of birth. But there is one thing for certain, they are all princesses from different parts of the continent. Six scrapped princesses was coined by later historians, it is said they did not act in concert, and had become slaves like their kinsman. They escaped execution because of their royal status, which is a form of fortune. The history books describes them as 'so beautiful that they are pampered like gemstones'. The royalty, leaders, and nobles treat them as their exclusive pets, keeping them imprisoned in 6 different countries. But they did not end their lives as slaves, some used magic, some led a rebellion of enslaved Alv, some controlled the royalty from the dark, all of them started revolutions against the whole human race."

Shiroe was attracted to these words, but his emotions remained neutral, leaning towards the Alv at most. From the view of a modern Japanese, the humans of the alternate world attacked the Alv out of envy of their magic technology and the remnants of the Alv started terrorist attacks to retaliate, all these were within expectations.

"The human, elf, and dwarf empires who destroyed the Alv gained many magical technologies, but they had not grown accustomed to them, so a war in the form of countless stalemates started. The reason of the stalemate is because the human, elf, and dwarf nations were fighting

among themselves. The six scrapped princesses were no heroines, but vengeful spirits, they orchestrated chaos behind the scenes, disrupting society, confusing the populace, spreading the seeds of discord everywhere in human society. There were many casualties in this war. If the records are correct, the total deaths matches the current population of the world. On the other hand, the six scrapped princesses were pushed to their limits. They were Alv after all, and their weakness of low reproduction ability made the population small. Even if they hid behind the scenes of the infighting among allies, they are fragile when discovered. As the six scrapped princesses were about to be killed... the first World Fraction happened."

"The first...."

They were finally getting to the point, Shiroe gulped.

He noticed Akatsuki beside him was also totally engrossed.

"Yes, the first World Fraction was speculated to be a result of powerful magic by the Alv. But there remains many mysteries, especially in the technical sense that we cannot solve. We cannot even understand the basic principle behind it, let alone replicate it. The World Fraction occurred, and the demihumans appeared... They did not exist until 300 hundred years ago.

...Demihumans did not exist.

This was something Shiroe did not expect, but he could understand why civilizations including the Alv were ten times more prosperous. The world practically belonged to the humans then.

"I do not think the appearance of the demihumans here was the result of crossbreeding or a biological problem. This is the research topic of my master, but I proposed an assumption that the World Fraction might be linked to the spirit. The world then had lots of spirit material as the population of the world fell by almost half due to the war. These spirit fragments were then used to make demihumans which appeared throughout the world and pushed the human empire that was ravaged by the war to the brink of destruction. Many cities fell, armies that claimed to be invincible were crushed, almost all the countries were dissolved. In this peninsula, the only country that survived in these 300 years is the ancient empire Westelande. Several towns and cities in the 'League of Freedom'

Towns Eastal' were only villages then. With the appearance of the demihumans, the world changed into the picture of humans fighting against the invasion of the demihumans and protecting their small civilized circles. The world is trapped in darkness, even after defeating the six scrapped princesses, their revenge was a complete success."

The six scrapped princesses were defeated.

The World Fraction was activated.

Large numbers of demihumans made from spirit fragments appeared in the world.

"Next will be the Iron Ages. As explained, Goblin, Kobold, Orc, Troll, Gnoll, Sahuagin, and Lizardmen, these demihumans terrorized the populace all over the world. These cruel creatures invaded the civilization circles of humans, and life began to lose its shine. After much research, defense magic and setting up of barriers... the legacy of the Alv... started to work. But there was no such assistance back then, so the humans planned to fight back. The first plan they executed was to use the secrets of the Alv to create new warriors, the 'Human Instrumentality Project', a large-scale experiment which created werecats, wolf fangs, foxtails, animal hybrids and race of ceremony, the re-engineering of a human. They were sent to the front-lines as a man-made race, the human battle for survival begins here."

When he only mentioned human, dwarf, elf, and Alv, Shiroe felt uneasy, but it seemed that the hybrids made their debut here. Wercats, wolf fangs, foxtails, and race of ceremony were races made for battle by humans.

"Several countries in Eureddo thought the battle was hopeless and gave up. They organized big fleets of ships to cross the ocean towards a new continent. The new continent also had demihumans, but they persevered and built their own country in this brand new world, and with the power of their faith, the 'Ancient' was born."

...The new continent, it should be referring to the Wayne continent, or the Americas continent in the old world. So in this alternate world, the Americas were discovered 300 years ago.

This should be the adaptation of the history of Eurasia and Asia, coinciding with the discovery of the continent in the old world. Shiroe tried to imagine the situation in the American server, but he shook his head and stopped that train of thought.

"There are several theories behind the 'Ancient', but there are definitely a number of them that came into being during this period. Regarding the 'Ancient'... let's talk about them another time, I will focus on the theory of spirits. Even after using so many resources and techniques, they were unable to halt humanity's path to destruction, that is how strong the forces of the demihumans were. Not only that, the effects of the first World Fraction were still lingering in this world. As I mentioned in the beginning, the demihumans do not fall in number no matter how many you kill. Even if you defeated them, their spirits would just re-spawn as demihumans again... This is just an assumption, but their reproduction curve is fascinating, so that is the only way to make sense of it. Even though they are demihumans, they still need a period of time to grow and develop. If you manage to kill a large number of them, you will be able to weaken their forces. In other words, the dead demihumans will re-spawn as infants, and won't be able to join the war meaningfully for a few years. But they can return after 3 years, the demihumans cannot be wiped out, so we have no chance of winning."

This...

Wasn't this the problem with the Elder Tales game settings? Shiroe wanted to interject. Elder Tales was a game, or it was a game before, if one player killed off all the monsters forever in a zone leaving nothing for the other players, that must be a disappointing experience.

So the game set the monsters to re-spawn after a specific amount of time, providing new monsters for the players. If not for that, stronger players would be able to clear all the monsters in the zone given an amount of time.

"The people lived in fear and despair, praying for a miracle. This was a really dark period of the world, it had been 60 years since the defeat of the six scrapped princesses and the first World Fraction. Humanity fell into absolute despair, poverty, hunger, and fear. Almost everyone was trapped in armored communities or fortresses, living every day in fear of demihuman or monster attacks, some even thought it was only a matter of

time before humanity went into extinction. The six scrapped princesses' revenge seemed to be working... At this moment, the second World Fraction happened, but it is different from the first, with almost no clear records and observation of it in the archives. It was the dark period in the history of humanity after all, so they might not have had the spare time to leave behind records. With the combined effort of the humans, elves, dwarves, and many races of ceremony, they invoked the holy summon spell, some religious texts describe this as 'God's Salvation'... anyway, the World Fraction happened again, the time is exactly 240 years ago.... Adventurers appeared."

240 years ago.

Adventurers appeared.

"There is nothing of significance in the history that follows. The powerful Adventurers were a gospel for all of humanity. The 'Fields of Dead Spirits', 'The King of Hades', 'The Jade Throne of the Dragon', all kinds of crises that hit Yamato were solved by the Adventurers. The world did not become peaceful, but it is now more stable, and is on the way of restoration."

(And so it links to our current situation....)

"Adventurers... Now that you mentioned it, Ri Gan-san you seem to know about me. Why is that?"

Shiroe felt concerned and asked.

"Because Shiroe-sama is an archmage, I feel that among the Adventurers, you would be the one who is most familiar with the situation."

"Archmage?"

Shiroe was confused, he did not recall completing any grand quest that granted such a prestigious title.

"Shiroe-sama first appeared in history 98 years ago, there are other long lived Adventurers other than you, but in terms of frequency and activeness, Shiroe-sama must surely be an archmage, correct?"

(98 years? This...)

Shiroe's mind circuit seemed to be catching fire as it ran, the time in this world, the history of this world... If you calculated this way, 240 years ago when the 2nd World Fraction happened was...

(...The day beta testing of the game started.)

Part 5

When they woke up in the morning of the 4th day, it was raining outside.

The rain that started in the middle of the night persisted into the morning.

It was just a summer drizzle, and the raindrops were small as well. The surrounding forest drained the water away smoothly and the tent was holding up fine.

(But entering the dungeons has nothing to do with the weather), Minori thought as she checked her gear.

Minori checked her equipment thoroughly after the challenge yesterday, but decided to check again before leaving out of habit.

(I should be... feeling uneasy.)

Repeatedly counting her potions was also because of this. Minori felt sorry for feeling like a child.

She tried her best to be silent, but noticed movements in the other sleeping bags as the day broke.

There were 4 tents, the 2 big tents were for the 2 beginner parties, 1 was for the instructors, and the last was the storage and changing room for the ladies.

The 5 members of Minori's party shared a tent with a tarpaulin outside, so it was quite spacious.

"Morning..."

Isuzu who slept beside her greeted, as she rubbed her eyes.

Isuzu had stubborn and tough hair, and her hair behind her head would be kinked after sleeping for a night. She was conscious about it as well, that's

why she always braided them. But Minori thought her hair was cute this way too.

"Is it light out yet?"

Isuzu gazed at the tent entrance with her eyes half open. The canvas was thicker at the entrance, but you could still see the light shining in from outside.

"Yeah, it is a bit dark because of the rain, but it is light outside."

"Is that so... I feel so sleepy."

"Because it is cold?"

"Yeah..."

Isuzu mumbled something incoherently and snuggled back into her sleeping bag.

Stowing her gear, Minori put a blanket over Isuzu with a smile.

(The others seem to be awake, but they are not getting up.)

It was drizzling outside, but they had a comfortable and cool rest last night. The sound of the raindrops filled the tent, giving it the steady and sleepy atmosphere of a secret hideout.

The monotonous sound of the raindrops seemed to be protecting them, their first leisure time since making camp.

There also seemed to be a shadow outside.

Minori turned and saw Nyanta sticking his head into the tent. Minori walked to the middle of the tent, and approached Nyanta. The tent ceiling was high enough that Minori could stand up straight with no problem.

"Morning nya."

"Morning Nyanta-san."

"For your breakfast.."

Minori nodded to acknowledge Nyanta's soft voice.

"We can't eat outside with the rain like that, so breakfast will be sandwiches with creamy crab soup, please eat inside your own tents nya..."

"Understood."

A few minutes later, Nyanta came to deliver breakfast.

He gave her enough sandwiches for 10 people and a full pot of cream soup.

"Thank you very much."

"Ah, you are welcome nya, see you later nya."

Minori held the tray with the pot and bowed awkwardly. Nyanta waved and went back into the drizzle, probably to deliver breakfast to the other party.

Minori placed the tray carefully in the middle of the tent and was thinking of where to put the pot. She then remembered that she had a foot lamp used for heating things in her bag, and decided to use it for the pot.

"Hmmm, is it breakfast?"

Tohya got up with an unkempt head of hair, Minori reminded him: "Ehmm, Tohya, your hair." Tohya just answered "Ehmm." Without much thought.

"Should we eat?"

"Let's eat."

Tohya moved slowly out of bed, Rundelhous beside him was also awake. He seemed to still be dreaming and says: "Morning Miss Minori... you are as beautiful as the sun as well." After this baffling greeting he staggered towards the tent entrance.

"Rundelhous-san, it is raining outside!" Minori warned him, but he mumbled: "I am just changing my face and washing clothes" as he left.

Serara came back just as the tent flaps closed.

Minori didn't notice when she went out, and Serara happily placed some fruits beside the sandwich tray. (Seemed like she spent the morning with Nyanta. A morning date?)

With Serara's help, Minori poured the soup into bowls. The reheated soup gave off the fragrance of clam chowder soup and seemed to be delicious.

"Of course, it is top quality!"

The cheerful Serara said, she probably tested the taste with Nyanta. Minori thought it was indeed delicious with the corn and crab meat mixed in.

"Wooo..."

Minori pulled up Isuzu who was lying down like a caterpillar.

Minori took a comb out of her bag, as Serara said "leave this to me" and took the utensils.

It was still drizzling outside.

The party enjoyed their breakfast in the cool weather.

Lying face-down, only the top half of Isuzu's body was out of the sleeping bag, and Minori was combing her hair behind her. Isuzu's hair was hard to manage and she herself complained about being so unfeminine. But Minori thought her light brown braid suited her well.

"This is nice."

Tohya commented softly, wearing a T-shirt and shorts and sitting with his legs crossed on his sleeping bag. This shouldn't be a sight to show the ladies, but it was given a pass with the training camp as an excuse.

Rundelhous said when returning: "Hey, the breakfast is so fragrant and wonderful today as well, don't you think so?" He had a refreshing air about him, fixing up his appearance in such a short time to return to his usual pace.

Isuzu, whose lower half was still in the sleeping bag, told him: "Rudy, this is delicious." and handed him a sandwich.

(Rudy?)

Rundelhous took the sandwich obediently, took a bite and said: "Woah, this is pumpkin salad right, such a delicacy." (He sounded so well mannered, he must have been from a high-class family.)

The group ate their breakfast amiably.

The gentle sound of the rain soothed the flustered hearts of the group. When the group remembered that they had to challenge the dungeon later, their hearts became heavy, and they lost their chatting mood.

They packed the leftover sandwiches into a basket for lunch, the 3 sandwich flavors were the sincere products of Nyanta, Minori's favorite was the fruit omelet sandwich.

There were fruits left on the platter, but everyone was holding their soup cup and sighing. They were all in a blank mental state after a full meal.

"That..."

Tohya said in this heavy atmosphere.

"Do you want more soup?"

Serara asked Tohya, with her eyes on the pot.

"No... it's not about the soup."

Tohya said, choosing his words.

With the gazes on him, Tohya repeatedly opened his mouth and hesitated, he probably could not find the correct words to express himself. Tohya was bad with words and hesitated like this a lot, a sight Minori was familiar with.

Minori immediately understood what Tohya wanted to do when their eyes met. Tohya wanted to break the current situation by encouraging the group. Was the brother trying to protect his sister and become a target for the group? Minori could see this happening.

Since Tohya was set on proposing an idea, Minori had to tag along.

(No, this is something I should have done.)

'...Listen, if you encounter any trouble, remember to move forward. Not your legs, but your hearts.'

She remembered the advice Naotsugu gave a few days ago.

To move forward with your heart, Minori felt that she finally understood the meaning behind these words, that was to have courage.

Courage didn't mean not backing down from a fight, but the will to overcome the fear in your heart.

Minori realized the thing that had stopped because of fear was her heart.

Because of this, she said with determination,

"Everyone, shall we challenge the dungeon in the afternoon today?"

Part 6

"Ah?"

Isuzu made a sound in astonishment.

"What are you saying Miss Minori! We are here for training right? The priority of the lesson should be to head into the dungeon as soon as possible and accumulate EXP to level up, correct?"

Rundelhous retorted with a strong attitude.

"But we can only challenge it once a day, and we left before 3 hours yesterday and the day before, right? If that is the case, we will achieve the same results if we enter in the afternoon, right?"

"You... You have a point, but we can't stay like this forever."

Rundelhous said fretfully, he seemed unable to accept this.

"It is because we can't stay like this forever."

"Minori-chan?"

Serara sounded worried, probably thinking that Minori would have a fight with Rundelhous. Minori felt her pleas to not be too heavy-handed.

"So, for this whole morning..."

Minori's words made Serara and Tohya tense up.

"Let's kill time together lazily."

But the tension was shattered by the 2nd half of Minori's words. "Miss Minori, are you joking?"

Rundelhous sat up straight, a hint of anger in his voice. His character aside, his blonde hair and handsome face was intimidating when he was angry, Minori shrank a bit in her heart.

But Isuzu was not afraid of Rundelhous at all and said casually: "Rudy, calm down." to ease his anger.

Isuzu was good at observing the mood, and she might even be too conscious of it sometimes. So her actions confounded Minori, she was not afraid of Rundelhous at all.

"Describing it as killing time lazily might be pushing it too much, but I feel that we should introduce ourselves."

Minori chose her words carefully and continued talking to her party members.

"My name is Minori, level 21, 14 years old, belonging to the human race in this world. I am the sister of Tohya here, I have the lowest level in the group. I am sorry for being a burden to this party."

Rundelhous snorted lightly at her speech, but Minori didn't mind. No, it should be she could not mind.

"My class is Kannagi, one of the three healing class."

"We knew."

"No, you don't."

Rundelhous attempted to break her flow, but Minori retorted with a serious look.

"You don't know about me, and I don't know much about you all too. What do you like, what do you hate. Do you prefer to be in the spotlight or to keep a low profile, I don't know anything. And because I don't know, even if I want to help... I don't know where to start."

"..."

Serara was totally shaken and tensed up. She had never seen Minori reject someone's words so strongly, only Tohya was not alarmed. Unexpectedly Isuzu was surprised but had a gentle smile on her face.

"Please tell me everything about yourself. I am weak, if I don't listen and remember it all, I won't be able to support everyone."

"What do you mean by everything?"

Serara asked hesitantly.

"Everything literally. For instance, what is that fireball Rundelhous-san conjures?"

"That is a lava ball, an Orb of Lava as it is named."

Rundelhous replied casually.

"Saying it like this is the same as telling us nothing... For example, why do you use this magic but not other spells? You know a variety of attack spells, correct?"

"Because this spell is effective."

"Why is it effective?"

Minori pressed him. Rundelhous collected his thoughts and answered.

"Among the spells I know, this is one of the more powerful ones. Not only that, it has a short cast time of 2 seconds and a pretty good re-cast time of 18 seconds. This is a good balance, allowing me to cast this spell every 20 seconds. It is not very rapid, but once every 20 seconds means I can cast this spell several times in a battle. Furthermore, even though this is a group attack magic, it takes the form of a small ball of lava weaving through the enemies, so it won't hit Tohya who is guarding the front. It is an excellent spell."

Minori listened carefully and nodded at his words.

"Wait a minute, the samurai's taunt has a short range, and its cast time is 1.5 seconds,"

Tohya said with a confused look.

"What do you mean?"

"It means that as I am moving towards the enemy, I will invoke the skill 'samurai challenge' to taunt them. Although it does no damage, it appears

to them as though they were hit hard, and they will focus all their aggression on me."

Serara also looked lost. She understood the words, but not the underlying concept behind the other classes, this was the first time she heard about these skills.

"Hmm..."

Rundelhous displayed his excellent comprehension skill.

This was a necessary knowledge.

If the monsters focused their attacks on the damage dealers, they would want to divert their attention away with a bigger threat, which meant stronger attacks. But to endure the attacks from them, the vanguard would need high HP and defense.

Tohya was a tank specializing in taking enemies' attacks with his high defense. He was strong in defense, but Rundelhous was twice as strong in terms of attack power.

To overcome this, tanks needed to learn skills that could hold the enemies' aggression despite having low attack power. Excellent tanks must have these skills to focus the enemies' attention on them.

These types of skills were known collectively as taunts. It caused low but painful damage to them, burning the impression that the tank was the hated enemy into their minds.

"Even though all warrior classes have taunt skills, each class has their own unique taunts. The range of the taunt is very short for Samurai, about 3 meters. It is about melee range where you can hit the enemy directly, and you need to lure them this close before invoking the taunt. It takes about 2 seconds between casting the skill and it hitting the enemy."

Isuzu listened to the discussion with a blank face, the contents were complicated.

"In short, the cast time of Orb of Lava and Samurai Challenge is about the same, but Orb of Lava has a much bigger range. If both spells are cast when the enemy is within their casting range, Orb of Lava will hit first, and the skeletons will target Rundelhous-san."

That was the conclusion.

The taunt skill that Tohya was using was not effective in the battle.

If the enemy used ranged attacks, it would be outside of his taunting range. The ranged attack of Rundelhous would draw the enemies' attention before the taunt hit anyway.

"If that is the case, it means I should not use Orb of Lava?"

"No, just hold on for 2 seconds before casting it."

"Doesn't that mean we will be wasting 2 seconds? In an elegant battle, a delay of 2 seconds can lead to a fatal hit."

Tohya and Rundelhous continued to argue, and they were getting louder, although not to the extent of a fight. There seemed to be steam coming out of them.

"...Maybe... There is a reason for the 'Coward's Fugue' to exist?"

Isuzu interrupted them hesitantly.

"Isuzu-nee-chan, what is that?"

Tohya asked with a confused expression. Rundelhous said: "It seems like something to do with weaklings, Miss Isuzu, is that a skill?"

"'Coward' Fugue' is a song I just learned, a permanent status buff song. A permanent status buff song will last indefinitely after casting it once, although I can only sing 2 songs at any point of time. As for the 'Coward's Fugue'... It can be used to disguise the damage of party members other than warriors to look insignificant."

"There is such a skill?" "Is that true?"

Tohya and Rundelhous shouted in surprise.

They knew bards had a large variety of support skills, but they did not expect them to have such a skill.

"Woo woo hoo... There is, this skill exists,"

Isuzu was intimidated by their passion and backed away. She didn't understand why they were pressuring her.

"But this skill doesn't increase damage, evasion, or heal, I always thought that this was a useless skill."

This was normal.

Minori was the same. If someone told her there was a skill that 'disguised the damage of party members other than warriors to look insignificant', she would think it was a pointless skill.

But now they knew this, it was a step forward.

"We need to know more about each other."

"Miss Minori, I must apologize. I see now that I am ignorant and shallow."

Rundelhous bowed and apologized without hesitation.

"No, I also did not know about these. Rundelhous-san, please tell us about all the spells you have. Not only the name and effect, but also what you like or hate about it. Or when is the appropriate time to use it, or when you prefer to use it, please tell us everything."

"Everything...Miss Minori, it will take quite a while alright?"

"Please take your time, I will ask you about it if there is anything I don't understand."

It was raining outside, but the group could no longer hear its sound.

What they could do, what they could not do.

What they were good at, what they were bad at.

Minori's group kept discussing until it was noon.

CHAPTER.

ATTACK

[襲撃]

5

ATTACK

► 259

258 ◀

► NAME: DUKE SERGEAD



► LEVEL: 19

► RACE: HUMAN

► CLASS: NOBLE

► HP: 1734

► MP: 912

► ITEM 1:

[INDIGO DRAGON-SCALE MANTLE]

A WONDERFUL MANTLE MADE OF A SEA DRAGON'S SCALES, DECORATED WITH GOLD AND SILVER THREADS. INHERITED FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION BY THE FEUDAL LORD OF MAIHAMA WHICH OVERLOOKS THE SEAS. IT IS SAID TO HAVE THE POWER TO CALM TSUNAMI, BUT ISN'T KNOW IF THAT IS THE TRUTH OR NOT.



► ITEM 2:

[FOUR-LEAF BOOKMARK]

BOOKMARK MADE WITH A FOUR-LEAF CLOVER ON IT WHICH WAS A GIFT FROM HIS GRANDDAUGHTER. IT IS PROTECTED FROM DETERIORATION BY MAGIC. WHENEVER HE THINKS OF HIS GRANDCHILD'S FUTURE HE TAKES IT OUT, BUT NO GOOD IDEAS COME TO MIND.



► ITEM 3:

[TELEPORTATION STONE]

A MAGICAL STONE WITH AN INSTANTANEOUS MOVEMENT SPELL SEALED WITHIN IT, A DISPOSABLE ITEM THAT CAN BE USED BY EVEN THOSE WITH NO UNDERSTANDING OF MAGIC. VIP PEOPLE OF THE LAND CARRY THESE FOR EMERGENCY ESCAPES IN CASE OF SUDDEN ACCIDENTS OR ATTACKS.



<table width=60%><tr><td width=20%; valign="top">Name: Duke Sergead

Level: 19

Race: Human

Class: Noble

HP: 1734

MP: 912 <td>Equipment

Indigo Dragon-scale Mantle
 A wonderful mantle made of a sea dragon's scales, decorated with gold and silver threads. Inherited from generation to generation by the feudal lord of Maihama which overlooks the seas. It is said to have the power to calm a tsunami, but it isn't known if that is true or not.

Four-leaf Bookmark
 Bookmark made with a Four-leaf Clover on it which was a gift from his granddaughter. It is protected from deterioration by magic. Whenever he thinks of his grandchild's future he takes it out, but no good ideas come to mind.

Teleportation Stone
 A magical stone with an instantaneous movement spell sealed within it. A disposable item that can be used by even those with no understanding of magic. VIP People of the Land carry these for emergency escapes in case of sudden accidents or attacks.

Chapter 5: Attack

Part 1

Shiroe turned in his bed.

It was almost dawn, and the dark empty room was silent.

The curtains were drawn, so even the starlight could not shine through. The room was in darkness, there was no difference in opening or closing the eyes.

Shiroe reviewed his day in the dark.

As predicted, the nobles of the 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal' contacted members of the Round Table Council individually with a variety of requests. Most of them hoped for military aid, the loan of technology, or wanted to sign trade treaties. They were more cunning and smart than Shiroe's group imagined.

If the Adventurers sent out an army, they could easily disrupt the balance of power between the cities. The nobles understood they could not lose this balance, and quite a number of them knew about 'Oceanic Systems', 'The Rodrick Firm', and '8th District Shopping Center' pooling their resources to make a steam engine ship prototype. Shiroe was surprised by this, and he could tell from Akatsuki's report that the nobles had a lot of spies in Akiba.

This means they were the center of attention.

Akiba did not classify any of the information from the public's eyes, so it was easy to gather intelligence from them. There were no real secrets at this phase, but the technology of building a steam engine and the related technical expertise required high level blacksmith and mechanic subclasses. Even if they leaked the information they were creating something, the other countries wouldn't be able to emulate them any time soon.

Shiroe, Michitaka, and Krusty held a meeting and communicated with the other members of the Round Table Council via telepathy to discuss about working with the League. Signing a free trade agreement for food should not have any cons.

Akiba could not provide enough food for themselves, and they were lacking in rice, wheat, potatoes, taro, and all types of beans. Signing a contract to open a trade route was advantageous to Akiba. On the other hand, Akiba would be exporting seasonings in the food category.

Salt, sugar, and all types of spices were the specialty of Akiba, but the processed seasoning products like soy sauce and other sauces could be made using knowledge of the old world by the subclass brewers.

Some of the requests of the nobles could only be accepted with additional conditions, or they would be kept in mind for further discussion. The number of rejections was several times that of the accepted requests. This was a necessary process for Akiba to draw the line on where they stood on the numerous requests and issues.

Compared to the meetings with the nobles of the League, the conversation with Ri Gan had much more impact on Shiroe.

(I can't calm down...)

Shiroe flipped again and thought.

Ri Gan was not an annoying man, Shiroe thought of him as an admirable researcher, knowledgeable and witty, but as for trust...he might not be trustworthy, but Shiroe didn't think he was lying.

But the history of the world he mentioned made Shiroe's emotions unstable.

World Fraction.

Spirit Theory.

As a global-level magic researcher, Ri Gan seemed to only be concerned with these 2 parts.

Ri Gan mentioned the spirit problem which related to the spirit theory. Shiroe was not an expert, he was unable to understand the technical details, but the summary was as followed.

Normally, humans' and demihumans' spiritual energy were known as spirits. The spirit was not one individual piece, it was made up of two related energies, 'Soul' and 'Essence'.

According to Ri Gan-

'Soul' was the energy that powered the mind, the psyche of the human lay in 'Soul'. The stronger the 'Soul' was, the stronger and more determined the heart would be. This would also affect the power of magic, MP was the manifestation of 'Soul'.

'Essence' was the energy that drove the body. The strength of the body lay in 'Essence'. The stronger the 'Essence' was, the stronger the body and its spiritual capacity would be. Fighters who specialized in weapons could utilize this energy in battle. HP was part of the manifestation of 'Essence', but most of it was 'Ki'.

When humans lost the ability to fight, they would not be able to move. At this point, the psyche was still present, but the body was separated from the psyche. The 'Essence' and the body controlling the five senses that was linked to the outside world would stop transmitting information to the 'Soul' and the psyche, trapping the psyche in darkness.

As the 'Essence' started to disperse, as described before, the 'Essence' was the source of energy for the body... Ki. Stronger and higher level bodies would take longer for the 'Essence' to disperse. Lower levels or frail 'Essence' would disperse in a matter of minutes, but strong 'Essence' would take up to half a day to disperse. This process was called 'Failing Essence'.

When healers casted 'Resurrection', it was used on a body in such a condition. The method gathered the 'Essence' that had dispersed around the area, reconstructed it, and sent it back into the body.

If there was not enough 'Ki' during the reconstructing process, the healer would top off with her own Ki. The information needed for reconstructing was taken from the body in front and calculated by reverse engineering. If there were any mistake in the calculations, it would result in the resurrected player losing EXP, this was an unavoidable data corruption.

If resurrection was not used and the 'Essence' dispersed completely, the body would not be able to maintain its form. In physical terms the body would start to decompose, People of the Land in this condition were

dead... Yes, resurrection unexpectedly worked on the People of the Land. But the condition was casting it immediately after death.

On the other hand, when Adventures went all the way through the 'Failing Essence' process, or the Adventurer willed for it himself, the body and equipment would disassemble into light particles, and be sent to the cathedral using the power of the 'Soul'. The body would then be automatically reconstructed, the cathedral would provide 'Ki' power to repair the 'Essence'. After finishing repairing the body, the 'Soul' would merge with the body and resurrection was complete.

This miraculous ability required exhausting both the 'Essence' and 'Soul' energies, which resulted in data corruption and the loss of EXP... But adventurers would come back to life if they died and they had an undying body.

According to Ri Gan's research, these were the death mechanics in this world, and the mechanics of how Adventurers came back to life.

"This is very similar to the reincarnation system of the demihumans."

Ri Gan said.

"When a demihuman dies... Eh, in this case when it goes into 'Failing Essence', their body will decompose just like the People of the Land, their corpse and equipment will be left behind. But their 'Soul' will immediately be reborn in another body, even if it has a 10 years growing period, it will still be an undying reincarnating body."

It was terrifying in a certain way.

But this was Ri Gan's and his master's hypothesis, most People of the Land did not know of this theory. If the theory was true, demihumans would be harder to deal with than previously imagined.

So, did demihumans have memories of their previous lives? Shiroe asked back then.

"I am unable to answer, there are 2 factors involved."

Ri Gan found this hard to answer, and chose his words with discretion.

"Firstly, the psyche resides in the 'Soul', demihumans and Adventurers have 'Souls' that last forever. The psyche, personality, ambition, character,

and such information must be stored in the 'Soul', along with memories, or at least most of it is kept in the 'Soul', this has already been proven. On the other hand, we also have proof that memories are stored in the body's brain. The body is the domain of 'Essence', so in other words, memories are stored in both the 'Essence' and the 'Soul' as a whole. Since that is the case, when a body falls into 'Falling Essence' or when reconstructing the 'Essence', I deduce there is damage to the memory. And the facts confirm this, as memories are imperfect or lost after death."

"Soul" is also where the emotions lie. Even an undying body will have poison in the form of fear, despair, and laziness. The demihumans probably are cursed by the first World Fraction, resulting in their spirits being twisted. A psyche under this condition might be able to retain memories, but they also lose the ability to recall memories freely and recognize who they were. This is like schizophrenia, or viewing your own memory like a history event."

If that was so, death meant...

In this alternate world, death was not a risk-free event.

This was a terrifying fact.

No, everything was just a hypothesis.

But Shiroe accepted this as a fact to calm the doubting voices in his mind. There was no need to use logical deduction, he knew through instinct. Death came with a risk, there was no such thing as unlimited life in the world.

(Ri Gan says the memory is stored in both the brain and the spirit...)

Shiroe didn't believe every part of the magical theories of the sage, but he still thought about something.

He recalled the development of the Elder Tales game, no, it should be the making and structure of all online games. Players like Shiroe sat in front of the computer at home, logged in to Elder Tales' world to play, online games were basically structured like this for entertainment.

If that were so, wasn't the real world's introvert graduate student 'Shirogane Kei' playing the role of 'Soul'?

Even if the character died, the player 'Shirogane Kei' would not die, he just needed to choose the game option to resurrect and Shiroe would be able to adventure again.

Borrowing Ri Gan's theory, all the memories were within 'Shirogane Kei', Shiroe was just a body.

But this was when Elder Tales was just a game.

Because of the effect of some unknown magic, the Shiroe now was using the identity of Shiroe to exist in this alternate world.

Put simply, Shiroe's 'Soul' existed in this world, not stored safely in front of the computer in the old world. The continuity of memories was no longer a guarantee, death would mercilessly harm Shiroe's 'Soul'.

Shiroe called out his status screen.

The screen displayed the number of times he had died.

The number was quite high, reflecting Shiroe's long gaming experience.

But Shiroe had not died yet since the Catastrophe. He thought death was a frightening thing, even if he could respawn, it still gave him a feeling of fear... It must be the same for the other members of 'Log Horizon'.

He was not sure of the extent of memory loss that came with death.

He could only hope it was not too much.

If death resulted in serious memory loss, Akiba would already be in chaos. The symptoms were probably so mild that dying once would not have much effect, or it might be lost selectively from unimportant memories so that the subject himself didn't even notice.

The loss might be so minute that it was no different from being absent-minded.

(Even so, I am unable to tell them about this.)

He had not told Michitaka and Krusty about this.

Shiroe also asked Akatsuki to keep it a secret for now.

They would need to say it one day, this was a problem that affected all players.

Shiroe turned again in the darkness.

The darkness was making him very depressed.

Part 2

"The patrols are approaching, let me see... 5 of them? In about 10 beats."
[1]

Isuzu who was poking her head out of the arch reported.

(Hmm, 10 beats is... 20 seconds?)

This was the first tomb on the right route of Ragranda Forest. The spacious tunnel dropped downwards, and led to a room. It was about 5 meters in diameter, with no doors, only an arch linking the room to the corridor.

Tohya's group hid their presence and hid in this tomb room with several stone coffins.

There were 5 skeletons patrolling along the corridor. This was the report of the best scout in the party Isuzu. From their experience so far, there should be one of them with a ranged weapon.

"Let's move according to plan."

Tohya said in a soft voice, the other 4 nodded their heads and spread out in the room as they planned, everyone checking their equipment on hand.

(No problem, just like we discussed beforehand, we can definitely do this. We cannot keep making the same mistake... we cannot continue to be on the losing end.)

Tohya thought in his heart.

(No, we cannot fight like we used to!)

Today's battle would be different from yesterday. You could tell just by looking at everyone's faces that they had the determination to make it work.

5th day of the dungeon challenge.

In the end, the group did not enter the dungeon that rainy day.

Tohya's group discussed until noon, everyone raising questions and explaining their skills. Someone suggested they needed to look at the skills in action to understand it, so they entered the forest to demonstrate. They could also do that in the dungeon, but they would encounter the enemies frequently inside and wouldn't have the time to clear any queries on the spot.

In the Elder Tales world, there were many monsters and wild animals in nature. Demihuman tribes like goblins, orcs, and lizardmen were a force to reckon with in the ruins of this world, and they were big in number as well.

Even though there were many monsters, the open world they were active in was also very vast. Elder Tales used the Half Gaia project, scaling down the world by half, much vaster and wider than normal MMO games or home console RPGs.

Unless you raided the nest of the monsters or you were hunted by the monsters who kept engaging you in combat, the encounter rate of monsters was quite low. Normally after finishing a fight, there would be ample time to rest and recover before the next fight.

But the density of the monsters in dungeons was different, since it was their base and fortress. Compared to the open world, in the much smaller and narrow space, there might be up to a few hundred monsters stalking in the dark. Players couldn't ignore this possibility.

So there would be continuous battles in the dungeons, the time between fights was much shorter than in the open world. If they fought repeatedly with little time to rest, MP would drain faster. Most of the samurai's skills had a long recast time, and they were unable to wait for the skill to refresh before facing another battle.

There was also the problem of lighting unique to dungeons, and restrictions due to limited space.

Battle in the open world usually started when you were 10 meters or further away from the enemy. The reason was the groups could see each other from further away.

But in the dungeons, you might encounter the enemy when you turned a corner or entered a room.

All these elements made battles in the dungeons much more difficult than open world fighting. Defeating an enemy, of a certain level, in the dungeon required much more skill than defeating the same enemy in the open world.

Tohya's party had confirmed over the past few days how hard a fight in the dungeon was.

And because of that, they needed to carefully ascertain the abilities of everyone.

Not only the unique features of every skill, but the sequence and combinations also had many varieties. There would be many questions, like how much additional damage does 'Harmony Carol' cause? What was the probability of it activating?

What was the range of the sword attack that knocked down the surrounding enemies? How much damage did it cause? Each question seemed simple and insignificant, but there were many sequences and combinations which would yield surprising results.

In the evening, the explanation of the skills ended, and the next question was how to make use of each skill.

At this moment, Minori was acting as the patrol file, formation, operator, and field monitor.

The sounds of friction and footsteps approached.

The skeleton was about 5 meters away, Tohya signaled to the rest with his hand, and they nodded to acknowledge with a tense expression.

Tohya looked around him, and charged into the corridor without hesitation. As Isuzu reported, there was a 5 skeleton patrol group in front of him. Tohya drew his blade and used 'Vacuum Slash' at the group. The deep red shock wave shot out and bent in the air, slightly wounding the arm of a skeleton.

After confirming the hit, Tohya immediately dashed into the tomb without looking back, running into the deepest corner. The clear sound of bones

hitting bones was chaotic and shrill. The footsteps of the patrol were in rhythm, but after discovering a hostile, they would charge at him in just a few seconds.

The skeletons rushing into the tomb were black all over, giving off the aura of death. Their dark eye-sockets burned with a greenish white flame.

The 5 skeletons went through the arch, 4 of them went after Tohya in the depths of the room, while 1 archer remained at the entrance.

But everything was going just as they planned.

"I leave that side to you guys!"

As if she was acting on cue from Tohya, Isuzu stabbed her 2 handed spear at the skeleton archer and Minori waved her knife wildly.

The attacks from the 2 ladies caused some damage to the archer skeleton, but they were unable to stop it from moving. These undead types would not flinch from any attack unless it was defeated.

"...Since it is just you alone, I have something more suitable than Orb of Lava... taste the power of the elegant sorcerer! 'Lightning Chamber'!"

A feeling similar to a spasm made Isuzu and Minori retreat.

The electricity made the sign of a 5 point star for an instant and the skeleton archer was imprisoned in a cage of purple lightning. The lightning cast by the sorcerer bounced between the ceiling and the ground, and the skeleton archer disintegrated from the attack.

"Great!"

Tohya grinned as he saw this scene, he battled the 4 skeletons with his back to the wall, refusing to back down from the fight. Serara was in charge of healing him.

"HP at 84%, he can continue to endure it!"

'Heartbeat Healing' was a heal over time spell. Combined with the occasional 'Heal' spell, Tohya was able to stand up to the 4 skeletons' attacks with his HP over 80%.

But it was painful.

The axe strike of the skeleton was dangerous, if there were no healing support, he was not sure if he could last more than a minute. But Serara's healing was supporting Tohya in this fight.

"Minori please confirm, Isuzu-nee-chan, Rudy-nii, please prepare to attack!"

The party members sounded out to acknowledge Tohya and got into their positions. Minori headed to the entrance, Rundelhous and Isuzu moved behind the skeletons that were focused on Tohya.

"They are totally infuriated?"

Rundelhous looked haughtily at the skeletons.

"Yes, there was enough time so I used 'Samurai Challenge' twice on each of them, they won't go with Rudy so easily."

"Good, now I can attack without fear!"

Rundelhous started to chant his attack spell immediately.

And so did Isuzu. She started casting her magic later but finished before Rundelhous. She stuck her spear into the ground and the bells on her spearhead started to ring, the sound wave piercing through the skeleton group.

"I have confirmed the situation in the pathway, no visual of any follow-up patrols, there is no problem. Rundelhous-san, please do it!"

"Leave it to me, Miss Minori! Orb of Lava!"

Rundelhous cast his spell as instructed by Minori, a compressed stone glowing like molten magma appeared at his fingertip.

Tohya used 'Samurai Challenge' again.

Rundelhous' attack was very high, Tohya had to taunt the monsters again to draw all their attention to him.

He had already used taunt skills multiple times, but he cast it again to play it safe. Tohya was a samurai and the image of Naotsugu's back appeared in his mind.

'...Tohya, the duty of the vanguard is to tank all the attacks of the enemies and to trust your allies, right? This is an oath between men, okay?'

Tohya stared at the skeleton group with unwavering eyes. Rundelhous who was standing behind the group was chanting his spell to turn his magic into destructive power.

The boiling lava ball cast an orange light in the room that was full of heat and caused their vision to sway mysteriously. The ball shot out from his hands and pierced through the extreme left skeleton, rebounded off thin air and pierced a 2nd monster's body.

The small bouncing ball of death repeatedly pierced and smashed the skeletons' bodies with its destructive power. Rundelhous followed up with his wide area spell 'Frigid Wind'.

"And so it ends. All of you, return to the dark world that befits you!"

The chilling wind made the skeletons struggling in the heat fall to the ground in a heap.

The sounds of the battle were gone abruptly, and the tomb was filled with the gasping breath of the group.

Tohya held his sword on guard, Rundelhous held his staff that was still channeling magic and Serara cast 'Heal' on reflex to prepare for the next battle.

Everyone looked at Minori at the entrance.

Minori carefully scanned the tunnel again before turning to face her party members.

"There are no reinforcements, this battle has ended."

These words put them at ease.

"Hmmp, this should be the way."

"That was a pretty crazy way to handle it!"

"Yes, thank you everyone for your hard work!"

Minori and Tohya looked at the smiles of their comrades, and bumped their fists.

Part 3

Everyone worked so hard.

Minori's face relaxed with a smile when she thought of that.

Minori's party explored the dungeon for 7 hours for their 5th day dungeon challenge, battling 22 times, only fighting 2 enemy patrols at the same time once. She thought that their way of handling the battle was several times sharper than 2 days ago.

There was a short rest after every fight.

The short break was to cure their HP and debuffs, as well as recovering their MP fully. But there was another meaning for this.

The group would do an after action review, agree on the smooth parts and find ways to improve it. This was a time to discuss the next battle location and plan, make preparations for the next battle.

The first was to confirm the battle formation.

Tohya was a solid samurai vanguard, so they needed to focus the enemies' attacks on him, this was the most basic tactic, but this obvious move needed the cooperation of the whole party.

'How do you set it up so the party members other than Tohya can move?' If you never considered this before making your move, Tohya would not be able to draw the enemies' attention.

The next was information control, that was the job of monitoring the HP of all party members. In the present Elder Tales, it was hard to confirm each other's status in the heat of the battle, even more so for melee fighters.

This was now common sense in the alternate world.

This time, there were 2 healers in the party.

This means they would have the benefit of rapid HP recovery, but it had a weak point.

If both healers worked on the same target together, they could recover the HP rapidly. But it could also result in over-healing the target, a waste of mana and time.

If there were any other casualties, Minori and Serara's main healing spell could be stuck in cool down, resulting in a gap in healing...This might do more harm than good.

After Minori and Serara discussed about it, it was decided that Serara would be solely responsible for managing Tohya's HP. If she needed help, Serara would ask Minori for aid.

Minori who was free from healing duties volunteered to act as a field monitor for the battlefield. The duty included acting as a reserve for healing or attacking as well as watching the surrounding zones for any enemy reinforcements.

With this assigned post, the chance of the battle becoming a free for all dropped to the minimum. If they could discover the reinforcements before hand, they would be able to increase the healing spells or change the support magics to prepare.

High alert patrol file was a formation they could use while moving that maintained the battle formation as well as scouting in all directions.

The team was led by Tohya and Minori as the rear guard.

The two of them were twins, so they could watch each others' blind spots and detect the approaching enemy as well as a sense of the battles. The member who was best at hiding her presence and scouting was Isuzu, in charge of keeping an eye on both the twins and looking out for signs of danger in all directions. If there was a need, she would scout ahead alone.

By moving in this formation, Serara would be able to monitor the HP of the party, Rundelhous could focus on recovering his MP. Serara was the main healer, Rundelhous was the main attacker, Minori's main point of this plan was to let the 2 of them concentrate on their job.



These were the 4 basic points Shiroe taught Minori about a party moving in the dungeons. It was not a game's system, it was the ingenuity and thoughts of the Adventurers.

But Minori did not know the meaning behind these basic points in the beginning. Even if you could explain it in words, it would be pointless and you would not understand, so Minori didn't talk about that.

What she needed to do was very simple.

That was to sound out your intent and have a discussion about it.

If you needed help, just say "please help."

If you were healing, just say "I will heal you."

If the enemy was approaching, just say "the enemy is close."

"Prioritize the ranged enemy", "Leave him to me," or "My MP can only last for 2 more spells", just say whatever you had on your mind.

These were simple things, just doing that would let you defeat the enemy one by one. The struggles they had before all seemed like a lie.

It was not friendship or hypocritical words of concern, it was a technique necessary for survival.

A party that could not help each other was like sealing your own potential. Adventurers like Minori and the others needed to help each other in order to defeat the enemy, this was how the alternate world worked.

On the other hand, this technique went beyond friendship and care, it was something warm and holy. In the battlefield where seconds meant the difference between life and death, if you requested for aid you needed to say directly, or if you could predict the need of your comrades then help them. You would need to know each other well beforehand and have the knowledge and understanding of all the skills they had.

To fight in front of the room? Or to pull the battle line further back before engaging? Start the battle with a sneak attack? Or to lure them out into the open? Could you envision the scene of victory? What did it look like? Do you want to let your party member handle this?

Minori's group focused on all possible questions, and shared their own answers. This was a strict test of how well you knew your teammates. As Minori's group slowly passed the test, the 5 Adventurers were now a real party.

"Ah ha, Minori, your nose is all black."

Isuzu laughed loudly.

As they left the dungeon, the last light of the afternoon illuminated the woods. It was already evening, the sky should turn red in 30 minutes. Isuzu pointed at Minori's nose in the sunlight.

"You got dust on it? Or is it a spiderweb?"

Isuzu laughed heartily at Minori, but her leather armor and forehead were also drenched in sweat and brown from the mud.

(But her smiling eyes are so clear, so pretty.)

Minori took out a cloth from her bag and passed it to her with a smile: "You too." Isuzu wiped her face in a hurry, and had a disappointed expression when she looked at the dirty cloth.

"Wooo, am I black all over?"

"You are not dirty to that extent, but do you want to go to the spring?"

"Alright, ah... Serara-chan let's go together, okay?"

Isuzu invited Serara who was walking in front.

"What is it Minori, are you going to the spring too?"

Tohya who was leading the way heard the conversation and turned around. Seems like he was discussing with Rundelhous about showering there.

"Wooo, but we are all sweaty..."

"Ladies first. Tohya-kun, just bear with it."

Rundelhous consoled Tohya.

Rundelhous was also covered in soot, with no sign of his handsome face. His shiny tunic had also lost its shine.

Today's exploration was huge progress.

They even reached the workshop at the deepest corner of the route on the right.

The workshop had stoves burning with magical flames, and the air was thick with smoke. The dead became skeletons and worked as they were commanded.

The monster controlling the skeletons was a 'Burning Dead'. Different from the normal skeleton, it emitted blue flames of the underworld from every joint, he was a strong enemy that could use magic attacks. But Minori's group took care of the patrols one by one, and finished him off with a blitz of attacks to take him out.

But because of the battle in the smoky room, they were now all dirty.

"Why don't we all go together?"

"Is...Isuzu-chan!"

Isuzu said casually and Serara rejected her by waving her hands in a panic. Isuzu realized the reason she was all flustered, and she also started to panic and explained,

"I don't mean showering together! We can wash ourselves at the side of the spring blocked by the trees, Tohya-kun and Rudy can use the pond on the other side, that's what I mean!"

Isuzu explained in a panic, Serara replied: "That...That's fine then." and tried to cover it with a smile.

"Minori, how about it?"

"If you guys are okay with it, Tohya."

The twins came to a consensus immediately and took a change of clothes from their tent. The 5 of them chatted happily as they walked to the spring.

The topic was about today's battles and tactics.

The burning dead was level 24, probably the strongest enemy on the route to the right. Shiroe mentioned before that enemies that you could take on safely were 5 levels below your party's average. The average level of Minori's party was slightly above 24, so the opponents they could fight without much risk were level 19. This meant they won a fight far above this safety margin.

The team was exuberant when they understood this fact.

Defeating an enemy of the same level with only a party of 5, this was a great result. They were surprised when they received a magical item as loot.

But the thing that made them most happy was that the normal mob battles were going very smoothly. Either luring the enemy to a corner or taking the initiative to attack, striking when they had the advantage with the terrain and position. The importance of doing this was more crucial than they imagined.

They learned the important lesson of watching out for each other.

(We are a real party now.)

Minori smiled to herself.

She was so happy that she finally understood the meaning behind Shiroe's words.

Not only levels.

If you wanted to become stronger, the key was not only levels.

To fight in this world, you needed companions.

If you wanted companions, you needed to take the initiative to talk to them, persist in interacting with them. This was a treasure you couldn't get through strong skills or high levels.

Her days at Hamelin were slowly fading away.

The days she was forced to level could not have brought her to these heights, this was something you could not obtain through leveling up.

"Mi...No...Ri? Fas...ter!"

Isuzu was jumping and waving at the deep end of the forest. Minori replied cheerfully and ran towards the spring with her back to the red evening light.

Part 4

(Hooo)

Shiroe kept the stack of paper in a leather file.

He was sorting out all sorts of documents.

Reports, investigation findings, gathered data... They had all sorts of names, but they were all documents with complicated intelligence in it. It included memos written by Akatsuki and the other Round Table Council members, Shiroe sorted the information on a daily basis.

Because they needed to be ready for any surprises when meeting the People of the Land.

These pieces of paper were kept in a bigger and more secure folder, and became a document too. Examples were request forms from guilds, lease agreements, contracts, IOUs, letters of authorization...

Shiroe was a scribe, his ability was to make copies of documents, books, and making curses, technical manuals, or maps.

No matter how complicated the literature item was, he could make it in 10 seconds if he knew the production method.

But just like chefs, scribes also had new possibilities. Shiroe wanted to do research on this area, but he was caught up with the work of the Round Table Council and had not made much progress.

This was a room provided for Shiroe in the 'Ancient Palace of Eternal Ice', he stretched his back behind his desk. The sun had already set, but the rooms in the palace were illuminated with magical light sources, it would be quite a while before bedtime.

Shiroe took the map of the 'League of Freedom Towns Eastal' from another folder. The map was not only well-made, but also filled with notes and labels written by Shiroe.

He felt that his subclass scribe had been very helpful, the biggest aid being the ability to make quality paper.

The quality of paper in the alternate world was very poor, you could often see parchments during trips and adventures. Some places even used paper that looked like tree bark. Shiroe's scribe ability allowed him to make magical instruction manuals, maps, and documents.

These items were listed as magical items in the game setting and could not be made with just any paper. High-level products required corresponding levels of materials, which included paper and ink. Scribes also had the ability to create special paper and ink, which were the ingredients for creating such magical items. Shiroe kept a variety of items in his inventory.

There was no need to use high quality ingredients to make normal memo papers, just simple ingredients would be enough to create quality paper that was easy to write on.

The importance of the paper was in its thickness, uniformity, and cleanliness, the quality of ink was its durability against light exposure, uniformity, speed of drying, and bright colors.

Shiroe mass-produced these easy to use paper and ink which was a great help in office works.

Shiroe studied the handmade map.

His finger traced a line through the mountain ridges or coastlines as he thought. If he frowned at any doubts, he would write it down on a memo.

For a long time there was only the sound of pen moving on paper. But this was cut off when Shiroe heard a ringtone in his ear.

"Yes?"

"Shiroe-san, it's me, this is Minori."

With the friend list, you would know the caller's identity the moment they contacted you through telepathy. But Minori always started off the conversation this way, a reflection of her polite nature. A big difference from the cheerful shouts of Tohya's 'Niichan, it's me!'

"Good evening, you have finished your training for the day?"

"Yes!"

Minori sounded so cheerful after sounding so disheartened the last few days. Shiroe guessed that they must have overcome an obstacle.

Minori and the others were participating in a training camp and challenging a dungeon suitable for beginners. But suitable for beginners did not mean it was easy to complete. On the contrary, it was a difficult dungeon that welcomed beginners with its hard battles.

In simple terms, it included "all the elements beginners must overcome" in a condensed package.

Pathways that crossed over each other in all 3 dimensions, getting a bird's eye view of the room from high places, the long climb with ladders, the monsters' patrols and the almost endless horde of undead monsters.

These were all sturdy obstacles to overcome, stopping the players from clearing them with just the ability of their class. The undead monsters were fueled by the limitless energy of grudges from the underworld, if they tried to break through without a battle plan, they would be tormented by the enemies' endless reinforcements.

"You made progress in the raid?"

"Yes, let me report, we began the dungeon raid at 7:30am. After exploring for about 7 hours, we left at around 3pm. During this period, we reached the furthest end on the route to the right and defeated the Burning Dead in the furnace room!"

"Wow, that is incredible!"

If Shiroe remembers correctly, the Burning Dead followed a floating level system, between level 23-25, about the same as Minori's party average. Defeating an enemy the same level as your party average and with only 5 members, it was quite a feat even for a party of experienced players.

It was also dependent on the compatibility of the enemy, but it was still a nice battle. Compared to the failures the past few days, this could only be described as an achievement.

"That's right!"

From Minori's cheerful voice, he could tell this was a fruitful trip.

She was so demoralized just yesterday.

Shiroe felt a sense of warmth in his chest.

Since yesterday, Shiroe felt his mind had been stressed by all sorts of things, including the foreboding Spirit Theory and a dreadful feeling that he did not understand from knowing the history of the world.

These emotions turned into a heavy burden he could not put into words, weighing heavily in his heart.

It could also be defined as frustration.

The feeling that he had not accomplished anything, and the unease of not knowing anything. And despite the lack of knowledge, situations kept coming up when he could not do anything about them, that was the feeling Shiroe was fighting against alone.

But hearing the energetic young voice of a fellow member of 'Log Horizon', he felt a flash of bright light scattering the dark fog.

Companions were your most precious treasures.

It might sound old-fashioned, but that was what Shiroe felt.

"How is everyone doing?"

"They are doing great!"

"That's not what I meant."

Shiroe continued asking with a smile. Minori seemed to be in a great mood today. Even though her manners were polite as usual, but hearing the perkiness in her replies made Shiroe perplexed and happy.

"?"

The image of Minori's graceful expression of surprise surfaced in his head.

"How involved is everyone? How did you manage to defeat them?"

"About that, Tohya is responsible for attracting and engaging the enemy, this part is the same as before. But we changed our tactics and get into

position from the start, luring the enemy into the room and breaking them into groups!"

... This was the traditional 'pulling' technique used for continuous battles so they could have the advantage in numbers. Put simply, it was better to fight 100 battles against 1 opponent than fighting 1 battle against 100 opponents.

"Taking out enemies with ranged attack is the priority. Also, I am the backup healer in charge of security looking out for reinforcements. We concentrate our attacks to reduce the enemies' fighting power...do you understand what I am talking about?"

"Yes, I understand."

Minori's tactics were correct.

She kept to the basic principles Shiroe taught her.

But they were not something you could execute just from hearing about it. Be it healing or attacks, every action in a battle had their own priority, who would be the one to judge the order using which criteria? How do you inform your teammates the conclusion of your decision?

Shiroe could understand the uneasiness of Minori when she asked if he understood.

She should be worried about communicating her thoughts properly.

In summary, it was to be alert of your surroundings and take out the enemy one at a time.

It was easy to talk, but to execute this tactic required detailed planning and steps... knowing the surrounding terrain, the range of their support, all team members knowing the range of support and attack magic. How to support any members that fall into trouble, they needed to understand each other and practice it.

When Minori was in danger, Serara would assist.

If Rundelhous got caught in a trap, Minori would use damage intercept spells.

When Isuzu fell into trouble, Serara would use heal and Isuzu would retreat as well. By accumulating a number of such detailed cooperations, their 'combat operation' gradually came into shape.

These accumulations of minor cooperation details, could it be explained so easily with words? Shiroe had experienced Minori's uneasiness before.

(Relax, I understand, your thoughts can reach me, this is a delicate and important thing... In order to protect your goals, you have to accumulate plenty of such meticulous thoughts.)

"Relax, I understand what you mean, is everyone taking part actively?"

"Of course! Serara-san's healing is powerful! HP recovery is several times faster than mine, she has a wide array of spells too, I am losing my confidence here."

For pure healing powers, kannagi couldn't compare with druids. The 2 classes had different philosophies regarding the protection of allies' HP anyway. Minori's kannagi class didn't focus on healing wounds, but focused on their unique damage interception magic, preventing harm from happening in the first place.

In terms of healing wounds after they had happened, druids were better.

"As you level up, your assortment of magic will catch up too."

"Is that so? Isuzu-san is amazing too. In terms of variety, she has so many skills it is hard for me to remember."

He recalled that Isuzu was a bard, so it was understandable why she had such a wide range of skills. She shouldn't compare with her since the feature of a bard was their variety of skills, Shiroe laughed softly.

"Tohya is working so hard, he can keep the enemies in check, and is holding himself from using his skills... Shiroe-san? Really, are you laughing at me?"

"Sorry, I am not laughing at you, really."

Shiroe laughed gently in reply, Minori at the other end was also laughing shyly, so there was no problem.

"As for Rundelhous-san, everyone calls him Rudy, but sorcerers are so strong."

"He's not in any guild?"

"Yes, he is a handsome man... but it is a pity that he is a bit dumb. But he's always overexerting himself, a shameful and interesting person. He is very close to Isuzu-san, and can use powerful magic. He will not back down before defeating the enemy, he should be the most serious person among us."

Shameful, interesting, serious, handsome and dumb?

Minori's description was all over the place, but Shiroe felt that he was a guy you could get along well with.

Minori gave all kinds of reports, like the battle with the skeletons, defense, and follow up attacks.

Tohya's fight, Serara's contribution, Isuzu's determination, Rundelhous' decisiveness...and a bit of Minori's active participation.

Shiroe nodded in reply to her every buoyant word.

Tohya's silly jokes made everyone laugh; Isuzu's black nose; Serara's crush on Nyanta; Nyanta being unaware of her feelings; Rundelhous holding the sandwiches with both hands like a well-mannered boy... So vivid that Shiroe felt he was there himself.

The happy times passed by in a flash.

Shiroe reminded Minori not to risk their lives and ended the call. Since Naotsugu and Nyanta were there it would be fine, but they shouldn't take too many risks.

After ending the chat, the room seemed to still be reverberating with Minori's cheerful voice.

...There were mysterious things in this world. Shiroe was not able to tell everyone that death had its risks, but he would need to do that sooner or later.

He had to live on in such a world. But if he could listen to Minori's happy voice, he felt that he could carry on in this world.

Part 5

The sparks danced in the dark.

This was the central hilly region in Sand Leaf, a plaza in the middle of the forest. This was the campsite for Isuzu's group that was raiding the Ragranda Forest dungeon.

Isuzu and Rudy were seated beside the campfire.

There were more people just now, but they had all returned to their tents now.

It had been a week since they started challenging the dungeon, this was the last day of their first raid. They were scheduled to return to the school campus tomorrow afternoon. Hence the group was only planning for a simple trip into the dungeon the next morning.

Isuzu's group had built their team spirit over the days, and had been staying beside the fire until just now, drinking honey black rose tea together. They chatted about everything as they maintained their weapons or armor. Serara asked Nyanta to pat her head, Minori was chatting with someone secretly.

As for Isuzu, she took out a lute from her bag to play. Lutes were a Middle Ages European musical instrument, its shape was similar to a guitar, and its size fit snugly into Isuzu's thin arms.

The lute had less note variations than a guitar, but it had a classical feel to it, bringing a sense of luxury to the campsite. Lutes were a common portable instrument in this alternate world. Instead of plucking the strings, you strummed them with your fingertips to play the unique sound of this instrument.

(Wah...Lutes are great too...)

Isuzu was chatting and enjoying herself, but she still felt the need for music.

Just strumming the strings like this stirred a sense of nostalgia in her heart.

Isuzu liked music and all instruments.

The normal country high school girl Isuzu liked it, but was not so passionate that she wanted to make it her future. But on the other hand, this was her pure and unpretentious youth.

To be honest, this was a feeling of 'Ahh, it is so fun to play with instruments, I want to keep playing'. She had been this way since grade school.

"Miss Isuzu is so classy."

"Eh, I am a bard after all."

Isuzu looked up with a smile.

With everybody gone, there was only Isuzu and Rundelhous at the campfire.

Just strumming freely without referring to any scripts.

Isuzu had not played a lute before, she remembered this was the European precursor to the guitar, used by the people in the Middle Ages... She remembered reading about it in music magazines, but the first time she touched one physically was in this world (the basic design was the same as a guitar or violin anyway).

Isuzu had a guitar and a cheap contrabass at home, but no violins.

The thing that bothered her were the 15 strings on the lute.

Even so, she managed to play and strum it after 2 months, playing individual notes was not a problem.

Rundelhous held on to his white metal mug and listened silently to these notes that could not be called a song. His gaze didn't make Isuzu uneasy and Rundelhous did not interrupt her music.

The music reverberated like the tides of the ocean.

Isuzu did not play any specific song, she just played a bit from here, another bit from there, editing and playing them at random. The popular

songs Isuzu remembered from the old world appeared and was lost in the sea of melody, the lullabies and classical pieces rose in her heart and dispersed once again.

Even though there was no need to stop, Isuzu chose a suitable part and played the ending notes. Rundelhous clapped his hands totally impressed by her.

"Don't act like this, this is nothing really."

"No, that was very beautiful, it is like the music merges into the air after you play it."

Isuzu also felt that was the case. But the soothing sound of the lute should be attributed to the environment and atmosphere, not because of Isuzu's efforts.

The forest in the starry night sky, the campfire, and the cool summer breeze. Playing music in such conditions would make anything sound like a melody from the heavens.

Isuzu wanted to say this, but Rundelhous' eyes were full of praise and admiration. She couldn't bear to find fault with this feeling of his, so she only said curtly: "Thanks."

After this, they continued their normal conversation.

Occasionally strumming the lute in her arms playfully.

The particles of music that appeared visually in the night sky was so refreshing.

"What do you normally eat, Rudy?"

"Warm sandwiches, warm sandwiches, or warm sandwiches."

"So you only eat sandwiches, is it the Mentaiko sandwich?"

"You are absolutely right, Miss Isuzu."

This was the product of a guild called 'RP.jr', who sold the food out of their cart. They were a small guild, but they managed to reap a lot of profit from the popular Mentaiko sandwich, the secret of their success lay in the 6 batches of fresh and tasty bread they baked daily.

It could be called the Mentaiko Potato Salad, the ingredients were lower than meat products. They had a good eye for running a business, Isuzu liked to eat it too.

"It is nice, right?"

"Yes, Mentaiko's chewy texture is top class."

Their favorite beverage was the trending black rose tea.

Adding honey or lemon juice into water and freezing it with an ice elemental to make a 'crushed sherbert' was nice too. If you wanted to splurge, fried pork cutlet from 'Buu's Kitchen' was the best choice.

Isuzu was talking a lot today.

She saw herself as a plain girl, and had no memory of ever chatting with a guy for so long.

Because it was Rundelhous?

Re-evaluating the young man Rundelhous, she saw that his eyebrows were long and handsome, and he had an Anglo-Saxon face of a model, or the looks of a prince. If he came to the country school Isuzu was studying in, there would be an uproar and school would be cancelled for a week.

But Isuzu didn't feel any romance looking at his face.

Isuzu thought deeply.

(That's right! Golden retriever!)

A large dog that was smart and had a noble air about it, Rundelhous was just like them. Smart, had a calm temperament, even the aloof nature was also alike. Like the drooping corners of the eyes, a bit silly if you got to know him, and his friendly demeanor were all the same.

In Isuzu's mind, she was completely equating Rundelhous with a dog.

(I understand now, that is why I am not afraid of him.)

Isuzu loved dogs, and she thought dogs loved her too.

The feeling she had with Rundelhous was the same as taking care of a large dog, so she was not nervous. Isuzu accepted this line of thought.

The topic shifted to where they were staying, Isuzu was living in the guild hall, but Rundelhous did not join any guild.

"Hmmpf, I have a royal suite on the second floor of Sedan Hotel."

Even though he was speaking arrogantly, Isuzu thought of it as the feelings of a puppy barking, so she did not mind. Sedan Hotel was in the low to mid-range level in Akiba, it was popular due to its location, but its price and facilities were normal.

(Hold on, this is not something you can say so arrogantly, right?)

The royal suite on the second floor sounded impressive, but it was just a normal room for an Adventurer, it didn't have any deeper meaning.

Isuzu felt the way he talked so arrogantly was like the nature of a golden retriever.

But there was a cuteness about it.

"Is that so. Speaking of which, why didn't you join any guild Rudy? You don't want to?"

"To bind my shining talent to just one place is a sin, right?"

Rundelhous replied haughtily, giving her a look casually.

(This is the first time I have seen someone giving off a look so naturally, Rudy is amazing... although he is an idiot.) [2]

Rundelhous was an idiot, but joining guilds was their own choice.

She could not comment on that.

"Is that so."

"But Miss Isuzu is a beautiful and talented lady, this is the first time I have heard such a magnificent performance, you really love music... And you are reliable in combat, you are the only bard I know that uses a 2-handed spear."

"Rudy, stop...stop playing around."

Isuzu retorted. She chose a 2-handed spear because it resembled something she saw in her father's collection, 'a rock and roll singer holding his guitar up here after destroying a speaker'.

This weapon was heavy but Isuzu could wield it easily, which made her surprised. The contrabass was also 15kg, so it made sense that she could wield the 2-handed spear. In short, practice makes perfect.

"Hahahahaha! Miss Isuzu you are really charming this way! You are a companion I am comfortable to be around with, since we live in Akiba together, we have plenty of chances to meet after the training camp is over, please take care of me then!"

"You are right."

Isuzu nodded without hesitation.

From the looks of things, they wouldn't be leaving this world anytime soon.

And battles were scary, it sometimes reminded her of her time in Hamelin where she almost broke down.

Despite this, Isuzu had music, companions, so she had to make the best of it since she couldn't return yet. Isuzu learned to take it in stride from Minori, so she was able to accept Rundelhous' words directly.

"Ah, if that is the case, I will register Rudy in my friend list, if you have any good things to share remember to find me. Let's eat Mentaiko sandwiches together someday, hehe, okay, register register."

"Eh..."

Rundelhous' expression sank.

This was the face of regretting his failure.

And blaming himself for being naive.

In the end, Isuzu was unable to register Rundelhous on her friend list.

Part 6

The sound of a fierce battle broke out in the forest.

Swords and shields clashed.

Axes and spears collided.

Shouryuu closed the distance between him and the kannagi in an instant. The level 38 young man was trying to create distance while chanting the spell "Holy Curse of the Sword"...

Shouryuu used the basic swashbuckler skill 'Razor Edge' to interrupt his spell after closing in on him.

The young player fell with a cough, Shouryuu offered him his hand and helped him up.

"I know you are retreating in order to chant your spells, but you will be stopped if the enemy sees through your intent. It should be fine if you are just fighting monsters, but you will be facing tougher adversaries in the future. You need to increase your familiarity with combination attacks."

"Was I too slow?"

"You are not slow, just too honest. You need to work on varying your movements to keep your foes off guard."

The young man accepted Shouryuu's advice with a nod.

In Elder Tales, you were considered a mid-range player upon reaching level 40. You needed to experience quite a number of battles to reach this stage. This level was high enough for production players to defend themselves, but for players specialized in fighting, they needed more skills and finesse than that.

In the Elder Tales world that was no longer a game, this was a crucial point.

Even though Adventurers wouldn't die, they could still feel pain.

According to players who died before, the pain was not unbearable, about the level of a bone fracture or a traffic accident (that was still very painful). Even if you ignored the painful aspect, there were many disadvantages with dying.

An example was the problem of time.

When Elder Tales was still a game, the time in this world was 12 times faster. When 2 hours passed in the real world, a day went by here.

This was implemented with the quests of the game in mind. Some missions could only be done at night, so if the time between the real world and Elder Tales was synchronized, when it was nighttime in the real world, it would be night in the game.

If this system was in place, Elder Tales players who could only play in the day would not be able to do night missions. The players in the real world tended to have a relatively fixed schedule for their work and play time.

To accommodate such players, the in-game time was set to be 12 times faster, 2 hours was equivalent to 1 day.

But for the Elder Tales that had changed into the alternate world, the players were in the game itself, unlike when it was just a game, they needed to rest and sleep.

And so places that usually took an hour to reach in-game now took 12 hours to do so. If you included resting and the time to set up camp, the journey could take 2 days.

With fast travel methods such as fairy rings being restrictive in its use, this change was much more prominent.

Whether you wanted to raid dungeons or go to a zone with high-level monsters, the first troublesome issue was the journey.

This made EXP more important than before. The leveling requirement remained the same, but the amount of EXP you could earn every hour was much less than before. If you died and lost EXP and money, you would need much more effort to get them back.

If you thought of it this way, the difficulty of battling had increased, since there was no permanent death, the minimum security of all the players was ensured. But Adventurers who regularly partook in fights needed to understand that and hone their skills.

The young kannagi also understood this point. He unsheathed his sword and took a stance with a serious expression, repeatedly confirming the moves to activate his skills.

Kannagi were eastern-style healers, they could equip swords.

It may not be so in other servers, but in the Japanese server, male kannagi were called Negi, female kannagi were known as Miko. The clothes that fit these titles, Suikan and scarlet Hibakama for the maidens, were available to the kannagi at level 40, and many of them set this level as their goal.

New items in Elder Tales could be added by subsidiary companies through expansion packs. For the Japanese server, there were a lot of equipment for kannagi and samurai, including a 'holy sword' that increased magic powers. Kannagi who liked to play solo like this youth liked this type of weapon.

Shouryuu grinned at him.

He had potential, kannagi were healers, other than a few exceptions, they were unable to learn melee weapons and skills. But there were benefits to learning how to fight up close. If they were able to use ranged magic and melee weapons, their battle mobility and variety would increase, becoming an advantage for kannagi.

Shouryuu was about to teach some practical footwork when he suddenly turned and looked behind him.

He had always been right about his foreboding feelings.

A ringtone sounded off in his head, Shouryuu probably would never forget, but this was not a real sound, but a signal from his game menu.

This ring tone informed of a telepathy call.

"Shouryuu! Come to the beach now!"

"Mary-san, what is it?"

"Sahuagin are invading from the sea, the beginners are... Woo, come quick!"

Shouryuu ended the call, and shouted at the young kannagi: "Gather everyone, quick!"

The situation at the beach was unknown.

Sahuagins' numbers and battle power were unknown.

But the message was urgent, Maryele was out of breath and there were sounds of battle in the background. The beginners were all low-level over there, even though there were many higher level Adventurers with them, that was also dependent on the number of enemies, he had no idea how the situation was over there.

(What is happening now? Why are the Sahuagin appearing in this place?)

"Gather all the people and contact me via telepathy...keep in contact every 10 minutes!"

Shouryuu left these words and ran off. He blew his summoner flute in a hurry, but did not want to waste time waiting for his mount to come and dashed off into the forest.

It was important to take care of the beginners here, but the beginners at the coastline were less than level 30.

Sahuagin was a type of monster.

As you could tell from its name, it was a demihuman race living in the sea or lakes, a fish with 4 limbs growing out of its body. It was grey or dark blue all over, most of them had brown spots.

It was between 160-200cm in height, weighing around 100kg.

At the end of their front limbs were webbed hands, they used their gills to breath underwater, and were able to use their lungs as well when they went on land occasionally.

Because of either their skin or body structure, they were unable to live away from water, so it was a rare monster to encounter in the plains or dungeons.

Their intelligence was about at the level of goblins, most of them preferred to use javelins or tridents, that was the extent of knowledge Shouryuu had about them.

He had little experience fighting these monsters.

(Their level... I remember is about 20-30...)

A light brown horse rushed over, Shouryuu ran beside it and jumped onto its back. He then rode straight for the coastline.

He spurred the horse on.

Cutting through the green forest and the gooseberry shrubs.

The ridge roads that cut the hills into plots like tiles.

The sky was blue with nimbus clouds in it that were ever present in the summer.

It was a beautiful scene.

Even though it was a moment like this, Shouryuu couldn't help himself from thinking.

Even though the summer was so refreshing and beautiful.

His ear maintained the telepathy call, with sounds of panting, weapons clashing, and the shrill noise of magic tearing through the air.

Far in the background was the roar of the loathsome Sahuagin and the chaos of battle.

He could hear a dripping sound, maybe Maryele was bleeding too.

Shouryuu held back his feeling of urgency that was stuck in his throat like a stone.

He rode through the empty school campus, making a beeline for the beach. This wide ramp should be used by farmers in ancient times, with half-buried telephone poles and flags that had lost their meaning.

Shouryuu's horse ran across the canola flower fields and the fields of vegetables at top speed.

He crossed path with the fleeing beginners and reached the beach. At the front-lines were the members of 'Black Sword Knights' and 'Keele', Maryele was also in the fray to protect their comrades.

Shouryuu rushed into the Sahuagin crowd on his horse, knocking over several monsters with tridents in their hands. The war horse exclusive to high-level players was working to Shouryuu's expectations, showing its power in the battlefield.

"Mary-san!"

"Shouryuu!"

Shouryuu put himself between the monster and the pale-faced Maryele, protecting her. He was the battle group leader in 'Crescent Moon Alliance'.

Shouryuu's duty was to protect Maryele in battle, the enemy was Sahuagins, their level was low, but their numbers were flooding the whole beach.

"Mary-san, please stay back! We need to gather the groups scattered all around the camp...now!"

Shouryuu drew both his swords, with an elegant move like an opera actor, he charged into the scary-looking group of Sahuagins that looked like a cross between a fish and a reptile.

He turned into a whirlwind, and attacked repeatedly without avoiding the mist of black blood around him. He did not have a plan, did not think too deep, just threw himself onto the battlefield without holding back, concentrating on taking them down one at a time.

At this point Shouryuu didn't know.

The Sahuagins' tide seemed to be never-ending, invading the beach one after another. The attack came in like a dark cloud, this was just the beginning of the many crises happening in the Sand Leaf peninsula.

The young man swung both his swords as he leaped into the air, fighting to protect his comrades with all his heart.

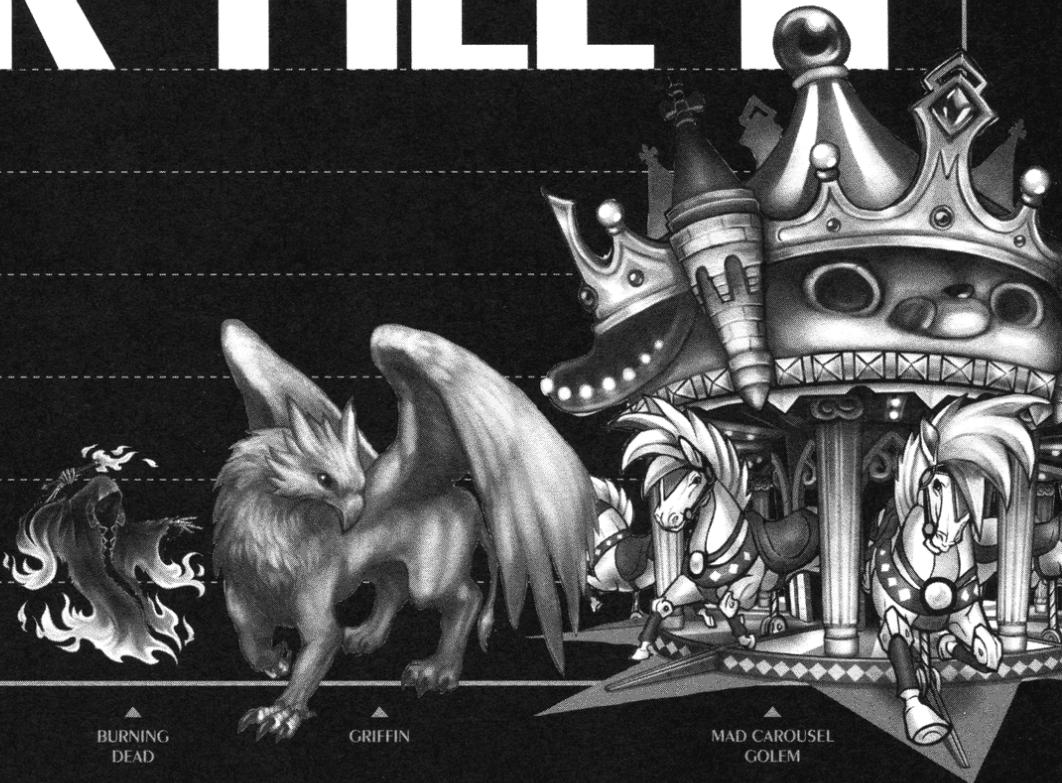
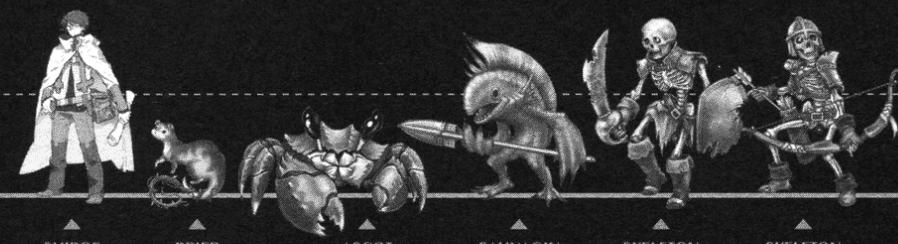
[ELDER TALES]

〈エルダー・テイル〉モンスターファイル 1

MONSTER FILE

〈エルダー・テイル〉の陰の主役・モンスターを徹底紹介 !!

illustration: 橋本モチチ



Elder Tale Monster File 1

Introducing the Elder Tale main characters behind the scene:
Monsters!

<table width=80%><tr><td colspan="2">

スケルトン
動く骸骨

SKELETON



▶LEVEL: 11~63

▶RANK: NORMAL

▶FOUND IN: DUNGEON OR GRAVEYARD

MONSTERS THAT KEPT MOVING AFTER THEY DIE ARE KNOWN AS UNDEAD TYPE WITH SKELETON BEING THE MOST WELL-KNOWN. THE SKELETON BONES LEFT IN GRAVEYARDS OR DUNGEONS ARE INJECTED WITH A CERTAIN MAGICAL POWER TO FORM AND CONTROL SKELETONS. THE BODY WITH ONLY BONES IS LIGHT AND FAST, BUT IT'S DURABILITY IS LOW IN CONTRAST. THE SKELETON SOLDIERS ARE STILL EQUIPPED WITH WEAPONS AND ARMORS THEY USED WHEN THEY WERE ALIVE, THEIR ATTACK AND DEFENSE POWER ARE SIGNIFICANTLY STRENGTHEND.

スケルトン・アーチャー
骸骨の弓兵

SKELETON ARCHER



▶LEVEL: 12~16

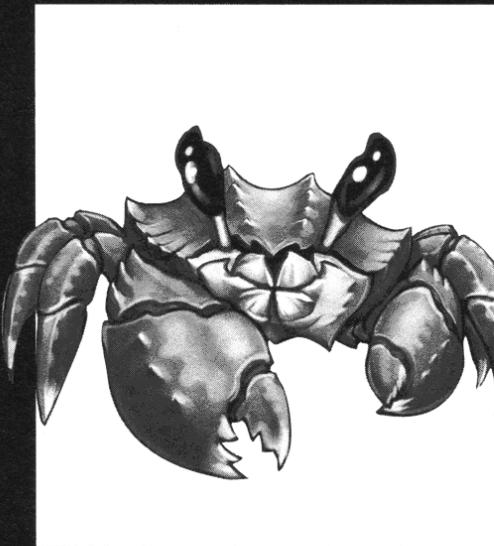
▶RANK: NORMAL

▶FOUND IN: DUNGEON OR GRAVEYARD

AMONG THE SKELETON ARMY, THOSE EQUIPPED WITH BOWS AND ARROWS ARE CALLED SKELETON ARCHERS. THERE ARE MANY HOLES IN THE BODY STRUCTURE OF THE SKELETON, A PIERCING ATTACK WILL MOST LIKELY MISS. BECAUSE OF THIS, THE ARCHERS IS ABLE TO NEUTRALIZE THE ARROW ATTACKS FROM THE ADVENTURERS, BUT THEY ARE ABLE TO ATTACK WITH THEIR ARROWS, A TROUBLESONE ENEMY.

アスコットクラブ
巨大カニ

ASCOT CRAB



▶LEVEL: 4~8

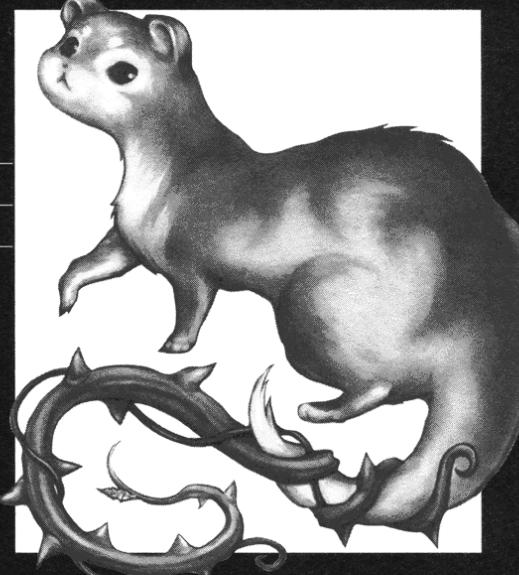
▶RANK: NORMAL

▶FOUND IN: WATERFRONT

BODY LENGTH RANGE FROM 1~2 METERS, IT'S BRIGHT SHELL IS THE REASON BEHIND ITS NICKNAME "APRICOT". IT HAS LARGE SIZE AND HIGH DEFENSE, BUT LOW INTELLIGENCE. IT IS EASY TO SEE THROUGH IT'S MOVE, SUITABLE AS TRAINING TARGET FOR BEGINNERS. THEY WILL APPEAR EN MASSES LIKE BUBBLES DURING A CERTAIN SEASON, DAMAGING THE SURROUNDING FIELDS. FARMERS HATE THEM BECAUSE OF THAT, BY THE WAY, THEIR MEAT IS DELICIOUS.

ブライア ウィーゼル
棘蒺イタチ

BRIER WEASEL



▶LEVEL: 8~46

▶RANK: NORMAL

▶FOUND IN: PLAINS AND FOREST

IT'S A SMALL DEMONIC BEAST SHAPED LIKE WEASELS, THEY HAVE MAGICAL ABILITIES TO CONTROL PLANT ELEMENTAL. MAGICAL VINES ARE ENTWINED WITH THEIR TAILS, WHICH THEY CAN USE LIKE A WHIP IN BATTLES. THESE MONSTERS HAVE A WIDE VARIATION IN LEVELS DEPENDING ON WHICH ZONES THEY ARE IN, IT'S A FAMILAR MONSTER FOR SOLO ADVENTURERS. IT'S CUTE APPEARANCE MADE IT THE MASCOT OF ELDER TALES.

<tr><td width=50% valign="top">Skeleton

Level: 11-63

Rank: Normal

Found in: Dungeon or graveyard

Monsters that keep moving after they died are known as undead type, with skeletons being the most well-known. The skeleton bones left in graveyards or dungeons are injected with a certain magical power to form and control skeletons. A body with only bones is very light and fast, but its durability is low in contrast. The skeleton soldiers are still equipped with the weapons and armor they used when they were alive, their attack and defense power are significantly strengthened.<td width=50%

valign="top">Ascot Crab

Level: 4-8

Rank: Normal

Found in: Waterfront

Body length ranges from 1-2 meters, its bright shell is the reason behind its nickname "Apricot". It has large size and high defense, but low intelligence. It is easy to see through its moves, suitable as training targets for beginners.

They will appear en masse like bubbles during a certain season, damaging the surrounding fields. Farmers hate them because of that, by the way, their meat is delicious.<tr><td width=50% valign="top">Skeleton Archer

Level: 12-67

Rank: Normal

Found in: Dungeon or graveyard

Among the skeleton army, those equipped with bows and arrows are called Skeleton Archers. There are many holes in the body structure of the skeleton so piercing attacks will most likely miss. Because of this, the archers are able to neutralize the arrow attacks from Adventurers, but they are able to attack with their arrows, a troublesome enemy.<td width=50%

valign="top">Brier Weasel

Level: 8-46

Rank: Normal

Found in: Plains and forest

It is a small demonic beast shaped like a weasel, they have magical abilities to control plant elementals. Magical vines are entwined with their tails, which can be used like a whip in battles. These monsters have a wide variation in levels depending on which zones they are in, it is a familiar

monster for solo Adventurers. Its cute appearance made it the mascot of Elder Tales.<tr><td colspan="2" valign="top">



▶ LEVEL: 22-48

▶ RANK: NORMAL

▶ FOUND IN: WATER, WATERFRONT, AND UNDERWATER DUNGEONS.

A HUMANOID CREATURE LIVING IN THE OCEANS AND LAKES, IT HAS AN APPEARANCE LIKE A FISH. IT IS BETWEEN 180-170CM WHEN WALKING UPRIGHT. ITS SKIN COLOR RANGES FROM LIGHT BLUE TO DARK BLUE WITH ITS BELLY BEING WHITE. IT HAS THE ABILITY TO MOVE IN WATER, NORMALLY ACTIVE ON THE OCEAN BED AND THE BOTTOM OF LAKES. IT CAN WALK ON LAND FOR A FEW HOURS, AND MOST FIGHT WITH THEIR CLAWS OR TRIDENTS. IT IS VERY CURIOUS, VIEWS HUMANS AS THE ENEMY AND IS FEROCIOUS IN BATTLE.



▶ LEVEL: 23-25

▶ RANK: PARTY

▶ FOUND IN: DUNGEONS

ONE OF THE MONSTERS HIDDEN IN RAGRANDA FOREST, IT IS A POWERFUL BOSS LEVEL IN THE ZONE. IT APPEARS TO HAVE HUMAN SKELETON, BUT IT HAS EVIL FLAMES COMING OUT OF ITS BODY. HIDING IN THE FURANCE ROOM IN THE DEPTHS OF THE DUNGEON, IT IS ABLE TO USE FLAME MAGIC AND LEADS MANY ZOMBIES WITH THE ABILITY TO BUFF HIS UNDEAD SUBORDINATES. THIS IS A DIFFICULT ENEMY TO HANDLE, IT'S LONG RANGE AREA ATTACKS IS A THREAT TO BEGINNERS' PARTY, TAKE CARE IN HANDLING.

<tr><td valign="top">Sahuagin

Level: 22-48

Rank: Normal

Found in: water, waterfront, underwater dungeon

A humanoid creature that lives in the oceans and lakes, it has an appearance like a fish. It is between 120-170cm when walking upright. Its skin color ranges from light blue to dark blue with its belly being white. It has the ability to move in water, normally active on the ocean bed and the bottom of lakes. It can walk on land for a few hours and most fight with their claws or tridents. It is very curious, views humans as the enemy and is ferocious in battle.<td valign="top">Burning Dead

Level: 23-25

Rank: Party

Found in: Dungeons

One of the monsters hidden in Ragranda Forest, it is a powerful boss-level monster in the zone. It appears to have a human skeleton, but it has evil flames coming out of its body. Hiding in the furnace room in the depths of the dungeon, it is able to use flame magic and leads many zombies with the ability to buff his undead subordinates. This is a difficult enemy to handle, its long range area attacks are a threat to beginners' parties, take care in handling.<tr><td colspan="2" valign="top">

マッドカルーセルゴーレム

MAD CAROUSEL GOLEM



▶ LEVEL: 82

▶ RANK: RAID 1

▶ FOUND IN: ANCIENT RUIN

IN THE EXPANSION PACK 'THE LEGACY OF CINDERELLA', ADDITIONAL SIDE PACK 'MAIHAMA UNDERGROUND RELICS', IT APPEARS AS A STRONG MONSTER. IT IS AN ANCIENT AMUSEMENT PARK FACILITY THAT HAS BEEN RECREATED INTO AN EVIL GOLEM, UNDER THE CURSE THAT'S DESTROYING THE THE SURROUNDING FACILITIES, IT WENT OUT OF CONTROL. ITS MAIN ATTACK ARE MAGIC SPELL 'DARK CURTAIN' THAT IS LIKE A DARK FOG, AND THE STAMPEDE OF THE CAROUSEL HORSES WHICH USES THE TELEPORTATION POINTS IN THE AMUSEMENT PARK TO MOVE AND ATTACK ADVENTURERS.

グリフォン 鷲獅子

CRIFIN



▶ LEVEL: 41~69

▶ RANK: PARTY

▶ FOUND IN: MOUNTAINS

A FLYING CREATURE WITH THE BODY OF A LION, HEAD OF AN EAGLE, WINGS AND LEGS. ITS BODY RANGES FROM 2-4 METERS, AND CAN CARRY 1 OR 2 HUMAN SIZED THINGS AND FLY. HENCE, SOME OF THEM ARE TRAINED AS MOUNTS. GRIFFINS ARE STRONG IN BATTLE, ABOUT TO IRON TAILED WYVERN AMONG FLYING MONSTERS. BUT COMPARED TO THE IRON TAILED WYVERNS THAT LIVE IN A GROUP, ADVENTURERS USUALLY ENCOUNTERS EITHER 1 OR 2 GRIFFINS IN THEIR TRAVELS.

<tr><td valign="top">Mad Carousel Golem

Level: 82

Rank: Raid 1

Found in: Ancient ruin

In the expansion pack 'The Legacy of Cinderella', additional side pack 'Maihama Underground Relics', it appears as a strong monster. It is an Ancient amusement park facility that has been recreated into an evil golem, under the curse that is destroying the surrounding facilities, it went out of control. Its main attacks are the magic spell 'Dark Curtain' that is like a dark fog, and the stampede of the carousel horses which use the teleportation points in the amusement park to move and attack Adventurers.<td valign="top">Griffin

Level: 41-69

Rank: Party

Found in: Mountains

A flying creature with the body of a lion, head of an eagle, wings, and legs. Its body ranges from 2-4 meters, and is able to carry 1 or 2 human-sized things and fly. Hence, some of them are trained as mounts. Griffins are strong in battle, able to rival the Iron-tailed Wyvern among flying monsters. But compared to the Iron-tailed Wyverns that live in groups, Adventurers usually encounter either 1 or 2 griffins on their travels.

Log Horizon Terminology

LONG HORIZON

[TERMINOLOGY]

USING A SWORD AND MAGIC WORLD AS ITS THEME, IT IS THE LARGEST ONLINE GAME IN THE WORLD, WITH ITS PROUD 90 YEARS HISTORY, IT IS AN MMORPG LOVED BY ITS HARDCORE PLAYERS.

THE INCIDENT WHERE ELDER TALE PLAYERS ARE TRAPPED IN THE GAME WORLD. THE DAY THE 10TH EXPANSION PACK 'THE NOVASPHERE PIONEER' WENT LIVE, ALL 30,000 JAPANESE PLAYER WHO WERE ONLINE WAS TRAPPED.

► A O Z U W Z T - J Q W Q
A TERM DESCRIBING ALL ELDER TALE PLAYERS. THE PLAYER'S OWN IDENTITY. YOU CAN SET YOUR HEIGHT, CLASS AND RACE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE GAME. IT IS MAINLY USED BY THE

► A L T E R N A T E W O R L D
SHIROE AND THE OTHERS ARE TRAPPED IN ELDER TALE THAT HAS TURNED INTO THE ALTERNATE WORLD.

► □ △ — △ □

A GROUP FORMED BY MULTIPLE PLAYERS. MEMBERS CAN CONTACT EACH OTHER EASY TO GO ON ADVENTURES TOGETHER. IT IS EASY TO TRADE ITEMS TOO. MANY PLAYERS JOIN SELL DISCOUNTS.

THE GOVERNING BODY OF AKIBA FORMED UNDER SHIROE'S PROPOSAL. ITS MEMBERS INCLUDE THE GUILD MASTER OF BIG BATTLE GUILDS, MAJOR PRODUCTION GROUPS, AND THE REPRESENTATIVE OF ALL THE SMALL GROUPS LEADING THE

▼ J-O-U
I-O-U - N-O-Z
GUILD STARTED BY SHIROE AFTER THE APOCALYPSE. PIONEERED BY
MEMBERS ARE AKATSUKI, NAOTSUGI AND NYANTA. THE TWIN
MINOPI AND TORIKA JOINS SOON AFTER. IT'S BASE IS IN THE
RURAL EDGE OF AKIBA, AN ABANDONED BUILDING THAT HAS A
OLD GIANT TREE GROWING OUT OF IT.

LEAD BY MARVELE, IT'S A GUILD FORMED WITH THE PURPOSE OF SUPPORTING MID-LEVEL PLAYERS. MARVELE'S GOOD FRIEND FROM HIGH SCHOOL HENRIETTA ACTS AS ITS ACCOUNTANT.

Elder Tale

Using a sword and magic world as its theme, it is the largest online game in the world. With its proud 20 years of history, it is an MMORPG loved by its hardcore players.

Catastrophe

The incident where Elder Tales players are trapped in the game world. The day the 12th expansion pack 'The Novasphere Pioneer' went live, all 30,000 Japanese players who were online was trapped.

Adventurer

A term describing all Elder Tales players, the player's own identity. You can set your height, class, and race at the beginning of the game. It is mainly used by the NPC when addressing the players.

People of the Land

The way NPC call themselves. Their number has grown a lot after the Catastrophe, they need to eat and sleep. If you do not use your status menu to confirm, it is hard to differentiate them from other players.

Half Gaia project

The project Elder Tales implemented with the goal to recreate the world with half its scale. Its shape and geography is similar to real earth, but distances have been shortened to half, and the area is only a quarter.

Ancient times

The setting by the developers of the online game Elder Tales, a term for the fallen civilization in the past. It is based on the real world civilization and technology. The abandoned metros and buildings are the legacy of ancient times.

Alternate world

Shiroe and the others are trapped in Elder Tales that has turned into the alternate world.

Guild

A group formed by multiple players, members can contact each other easily to go on adventures together, it is easy to trade items too. Many players join guilds to take advantage of its convenience.

Round Table Council

The governing body of Akiba formed under the proposal of Shiroe. Its 11 members include the guild masters of big battle guilds, major production

guilds, and the representatives of all the small guilds, leading the revolution in Akiba.

Log Horizon

Guild started by Shiroe after the Catastrophe, pioneer members are Akatsuki, Naotsugu and Nyanta. The twins, Minori and Tohya joined soon after. Its base is in the rural edge of Akiba, an abandoned building that has an old giant tree growing out of it.

Crescent Moon Alliance

Lead by Maryele, it's a guild formed with the purpose of supporting mid-level players. Maryele's best friend from highschool, Henrietta, acts as its accountant.

Debauchery Tea Party

A group that Shiroe, Naotsugu, Nyanta stayed in for a period of time. It was active for 2 years, but did not operate as a guild. But it was a legendary organization in Elder Tales, and is still famous now.

Class

It decides the player's battle ability in Elder Tales. When a player starts the game, they can choose from 12 unique classes, categorized into warrior class, weapon-based class, healer class and mage class. There are 3 classes from each category, a total of 12.

Subclass

Have no direct relation to battling, but a convenient skill to have while playing the game. Compared to the 12 classes, there are over 50 subclasses, from convenient jobs to joke subclasses, it has a wide variety mixed in.

Fairy Ring

Transport device located in the plains, the transport location is affected by the lunar cycle. If you use it at the wrong time there is no way of knowing where you would go. With surfing the internet for guides out of the question after the Catastrophe, almost no one can use them.

Zone

A term to describe an unit of area. It might cover a plain, a dungeon, a city, even a hotel, or some small areas, can be purchased at the displayed price.

Afterword

Greetings, it's been 2 months, I am Mamare.

I am grateful for your purchase of Log Horizon 3 The end of the game Part 1, the story this time is divided into 2 parts. The next volume, Log Horizon 4 The end of the game Part 2 will be in stores next month, making Log Horizon a monthly publication. I have been in the care of lots of people recently, I apologize to everyone who is short on allowance! But part 2 will be the same as part 1, I will present it to you with plenty of content.

...

.....

Role playing as a man of society ends here, the next topic will be about Bon festival dance.

The weather has been irregular recently, switching between extreme hot and extreme cold, but the zone Mamare resides in is moving into the season for Bon festival dance soon. Mamare lives in Katsushika, this is one of the few old streets in Tokyo, meaning this is one of the few cities with Bon festival dance in the world. Speaking of the terrifying level of the Bon festival, in order to avoid clashes with other events, the Bon festival council will have a Bon festival dance every weekend in this season, repeating playing Tokyo Ondo through the speakers. The women society members who have been preparing and working hard all year just for this moment, will have diplomatic protests with their neighbor the Bon council in the form of a dance in the Bon festival.

Compared to the samba carnival in Rio or Asakusa, the bon dance festival is closer to the lives of the people. The drums repeatedly gives off the sound "Don Dodon, Kan Karara.".

But I don't understand what is so fascinating with the street side stalls during festivals.

Like the fragrance of the sauces, sweet sauce with colors that look artificial, no matter how you look at it, it is unhealthy, but irresistible at the same time.

And so, I came across the Bon festival dance by coincidence and sent a photo of some fried noodles to Mamare(younger sister), and received her

'angry' reply immediately. I cannot understand what she meant, so I send another photo of grilled squid, her reply was 'furious'. I have no choice but to send her a picture of a chocolate banana, her reply was 'just die'. I was in the mood, so I send a picture of corn on a cob and she calls me directly.

If you want to eat, you can just ask normally.

Now that I think of it, I told my sister when we were young that 'stalls at the bon festival are all managed by the uncles of the council, they give all they got for the smile of the children, the stall loses money for every product they sell.' Because our family runs a business, Mamare is an annoying youth who has been talking about profit and losses since grade school.

I remember the sad face of Mamare(younger sister) when I told her this.

But that was all in the past.

I brought some food home from the festival, the 2 of us ate and spilled it all over the table.

We did not eat like uncivilized brats intentionally, but the festival snacks are meant to be eaten messily, it's a eating method that is similar to splurging.

After Mamare(younger sister) finished one round, I started to talk about the "uncles of the council managing the stalls" and she lost her temper and shouted at me. Seems like she still remembered, Tch.

Left with no options, I said:"The stalls recently maintain certain standards, and is now managed by a system of individuals joining to run the stalls, the configuration of the stall positions are managed through IT. A group that is based on East Japan will provide ingredients to the stalls from a central kitchen, so their profits are several times that of normal food chains." this type of nonsense.

I was giving her a high class ice dessert from the convenience store when I said this, so she was moved even more by my words. This made Mamare feel a sense of guilt.

My sister, you said to me:"I will save a lot of money and invest in a Bon festival dance store." This type of finance product do not exist.

The big corporations cutting off the festivals stalls and running it with a joining system? Is this a virtual world? New Saitama? If it is things like corn

on a cob, I will buy how many you want to eat, but please don't ask me to buy 'financial future' like biomass alcohol. [3]

If I can bribe you with a ice yogurt, your brother fears that you will be conned in some place like Akiba and buy a screen painting back with a smile.

But on the other hand, an ice dessert can control the mood of Mamare(younger sister), I think she is really a minor character... correction, she is an important character, just stupid.

Next is a small incident.

I was casually surfing the net, and found out about the standardization of stalls, central kitchens, IT and the profit margins are all true, which makes me feel complicated. It won't be weird if there list a stock on the market soon, do not underestimate the world!

(Heavens! Log Horizon is being made into a comic, this proves that the world cannot be underestimated!)

Unrelated to the modern stall economics, Log Horizon will be published in succession in August and September as of 2012 , included in this volume are the twins Tohya and Minori, Crescent Moon Alliance's Serara and Isuzu, and Rundelhous 2 new characters debuting. Their beginners party will be raiding a dungeon without the aid of Shiroe and the other experienced players.

There are many things that do not go your way in this world, so you cannot always get what you want. The thing that is happening in this world do not go the way you expect it to. But even if your mentality, growth and effort is not going the way you want, I hope that after you experience this period, or everyone who have experienced this before will be able to read this book. Minori's party are fighting such an uphill battle in this volume.

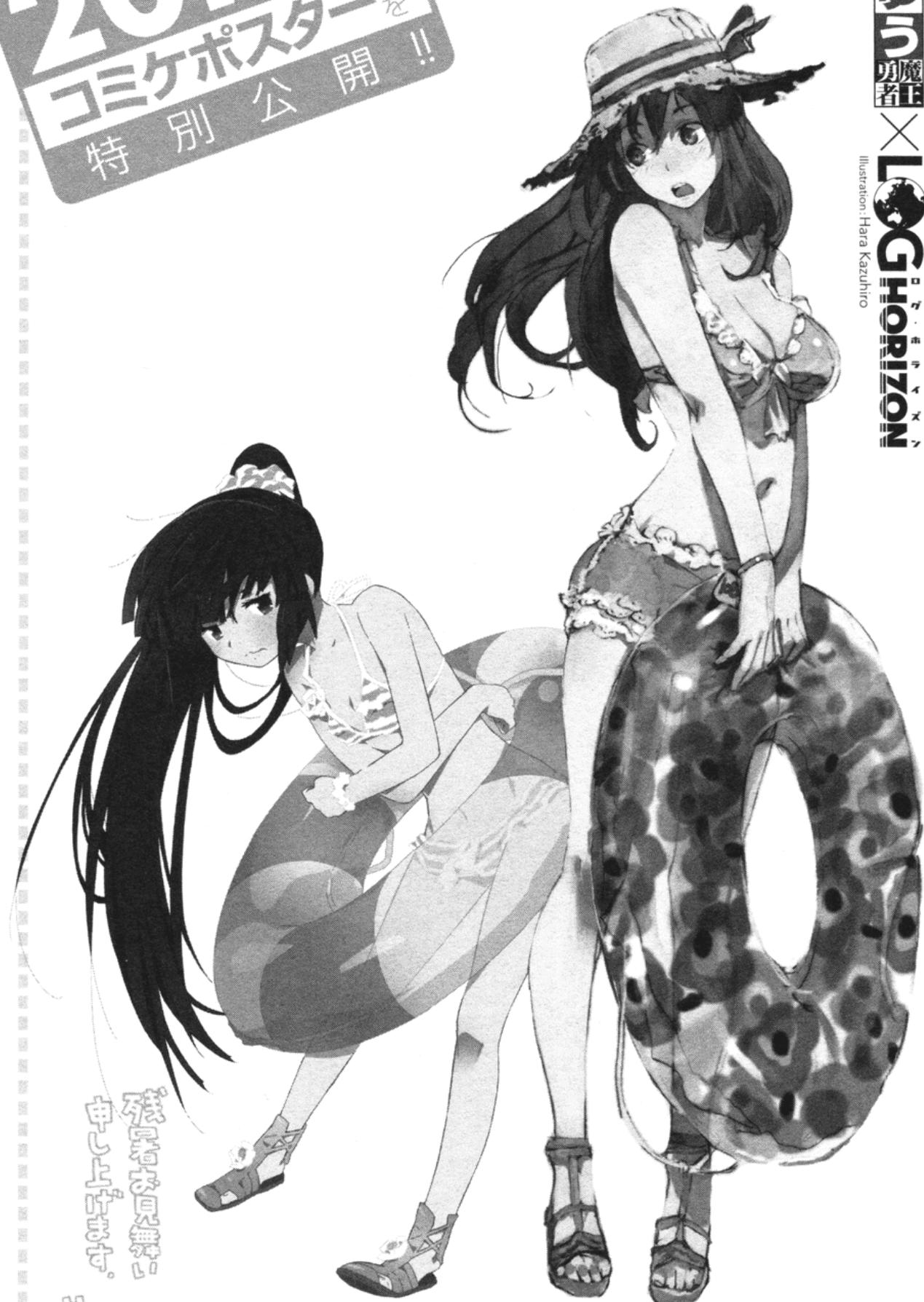
The equipment of each character featured at the beginning of each chapter, is also the results of fan submission during June of 2011. The ideas we used are from 545454248, FroisL, IGM_masamune, Mrtyin, RyosukeKadoh, ebiusl, gontan_, hige_mg, hpsuke, makiwasabi, roki_a, sig_cat,x_unizou_x and other netizens, thank you everyone! Even though the a lot of the submission did not make it to publication, I am still grateful to all the netizens who participated, and I hope I can use the information in other places.

To find out more about us and the latest news, please visit <http://mamare.net> , other than Log Horizon, there are other Mamare novel news as well, do visit us to find out the news about the comics!

As we move to a close, I am grateful to chief publisher Mr Shoji Masuda, and the illustration master Harakazuro sensei who drew Maryele's swimsuit design (important!), Monster designer Hashimoto Mochichi, tsubakiya firm for the publishing designs (the map was also done by them), the editorial department and my female editor the petite F-tan chan! A man who is akin to Mamare's writing master Mr Osako! Thank you everyone!

Next will be for the readers to enjoy this book, please take your time!

'The legs of grilled squid taste better than the body, right?' Mamare Touno



残暑見舞い
申し上げます。

TARA

まおわいう
勇者王 × LOG HORIZON
Illustration:Hara Kazuhiro

Illustration:toi8

References

1. ↑ <TL: music term?>
2. ↑ <TL: I don't know what look>
3. ↑ <TL: seems like a econs term>

Disclaimer

Under no circumstances would you be allowed to take this work for commercial activities or for personal gain. Baka-Tsuki does not and will not condone any activities of such, including but not limited to rent, sell, print, auction.

Credits

Story : Mamare Touno
Illustrator : Kazuhiro Hara

Generated on Thu Jan 2 16:20:49 2014